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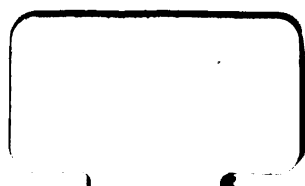
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# A MISTRESS OF MANY MOODS

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH  
OF ANDRÉ THEURIET

BY  
CHARLOTTE BOARDMAN ROGERS

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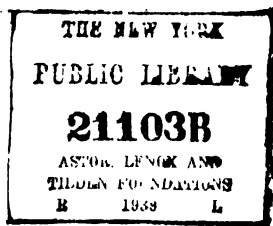
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To my most patient reader,  
To my most lenient critic,  
To my most faithful friend,  
To my constant companion in idleness,  
To my vision during hours of toil,  
To my first and only love,  
To my ideal of a perfect woman,  
To my mother, Sara Chester Whittingham,

This little volume is dedicated with all love and admiration

BY THE  
TRANSLATOR.

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## **CHAPTER THE FIRST**

### **Concerning a Home Coming**



# A Mistress of Many Moods.

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## CHAPTER I.

As one leaves the little village of St. Clementin and mounts the bank to the left of the Charente, in a quarter of an hour one comes to the hamlet of the Hermitage, where the road divides. One way continues across the fields, the other, rough and ascending, scales the hill and leads to the mill of Ages. From that spot the valley widens slightly, the hills opposite seem to be receding to give the country freedom for the river, whose lazy waters trace a long line between the two rows of willow trees. To the right and left stretch forth fields of thick grass; large hedges separate them, and footpaths shaded by large walnut trees force their way across. Some lead to the river, while others come out at the edge of a group of knotty fig trees and arches of vines, which have formed together like a porch of foliage. Up the

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river beside Ages, the valley is closely screened by a grove of trees of all shapes and kinds, to the west the horizon is bounded by poplars over which mount the notched gables and sharp turrets of St. Clementin. It is a fresh landscape and beautiful to contemplate, especially in the spring, when the splendor of the early twilight harmonizes with the new shoots and the branches of white hawthorn.

These were the sentiments of a traveler who, one evening in May, followed on horseback the steep path of the Hermitage; for he stopped on the crest of the hill and turned in his saddle, his nostrils dilated, the better to inhale the freshness of the spring, and his eyes wide open as if to embrace in one look the whole landscape. He seemed possessed with joyous emotions. The cavalier and his mount were warmly lighted by the sinking sun and clearly outlined against the horizon. The badly harnessed animal was a cross between a saddle horse and a beast of labor. The rider, light and slender, with a certain air of elegance, might have been about twenty-eight. He was blond, with eyes of deep blue which expressed a tendency to reverie rather than action; his delicate features indicated energy and bore the imprint of patient endurance. He gave to the valley

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the scrutiny that one would give to a friend after long absence. The grey roofs of the town, the orchards in full bloom, the fields where the grass waves softly, and the water of the river over which the swallows skim on rapid wing; all seemed to have an old, sweet history to relate to him. Suddenly his wandering attention was fixed curiously upon a piece of ground, where a hundred feet from him a spring, shaded by willows, formed a pool. There in the thick grass was a person greatly agitated, whose visage and occupation appeared greatly to interest the traveler. With gaiters up to the knee and clad in a brown overcoat he was kneeling on the ground and diligently digging in the earth with a tool which resembled a spade. Beside him was a tin box which lay, half open, sparkling in the dying sun and reflecting its light upon a few freshly gathered plants. He had thrown his cap on some straw behind him; and from a little distance the traveler could watch the play of his mobile and passionate face. With forehead high and smooth, eyes small and alert, nose like an eagle's, and intelligent lips: his whole person was in motion. The long face under the sunburn, and in spite of a toilet a little rustic, had an expression both refined and distinguished. He was tall and thin, and in spite of approaching



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fifty years he was still brisk and vigorous. In a few moments he dug up, with great precaution, a plant having bulbous roots, and his face expressed perfect satisfaction; his lips curving into a smile and his eyes sparkling. With nervous vivacity he searched in his overcoat for a magnifying glass and examined minutely his discovery. Then with great care he shut it up in the tin box, cleaned his hands, placed the box over his shoulder and, descending the hill with light steps, disappeared behind the hawthorn hedges.

After resting, but still absorbed in his meditation, the rider spurred his horse and skirting the meager fields of buckwheat and Indian corn, came through a grove of chestnut trees which terminated in a vast heath covered with prickly broom and furze. The day was drawing to a close; the sun descended behind the trees; and the murmur of the distant river seemed louder: a voice from a herdsman at the other extremity of the heath sang in a slow and melancholy tone an old ballad very popular in the west.

*“ Le beau soldat de guerre revient,  
Revient droit chez son père,  
‘Bonjour, mes père, mère,  
Frères, sœurs, et parents.*

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*Et où est donc mon amie,  
Que mon cœur aime tant?*

*"Son père lui répond:  
'Son amie, elle est morte,  
Elle est bien loin d'ici,  
Son corps est dans la terre  
Son âme en paradis.'"*

Plunged deeper than ever in his reverie the young man rode quietly on in the sandy path, when he was suddenly called to reality by the shying of his horse and the furious barking of a dog. At the same moment a peasant, who had gone to sleep along the road, awoke and stood before him. He was a man of thirty, small, dark, and clad in ragged garments. He took the horse by the bridle and held him back with one hand.

"One generally cries 'take care,'" he said in a rough voice, the dog still barking and the horse commencing to kick.

"Keep your dog quiet," said the rider impatiently, "and let me have the road."

The peasant without releasing the bridle, regarded his interlocutor, his fawn-colored eyes sparkling under the brim of his old hat.

"Indeed, Master Jousserant," he exclaimed, "is

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it true that you would clear the whole world for your successful journey?"

"Who are you then, you?" cried the young man, overcome with anger.

The peasant shrugged his shoulders: "Who am I? Ask the people of the mill; they will tell you; if you do not recognize me." He dropped the bridle and whistled to his dog. "Quiet, Rougeaud, quiet—come along—we are not at home here."

He turned suddenly on his heel and disappeared in the bushes, leaving the traveler surprised and thoughtful. The horse, given his liberty and smelling the vicinity of his stable, began to trot, and rapidly ascended the slope which led to Ages. Already at the top of the road which was embedded between two hills planted with service trees, one could distinguish the mill and hear the fresh bubbling of the Charente, which divided at that spot and seemed to lull in its arms the woody little islands linked together by moss-covered bridges. The click-click of the mill-wheel and the murmur of the dam joined with the din of the washerwoman's beetle in the laundry. The night had come, and several stars peeped out between the branches. The horse turned briskly to the right, and wending his way through an avenue of lindens and under an iron wagon-gate, came out at

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the great entrance of the estate of Ages. In a few moments the traveler was received at the foot of the steps by an old peasant woman in a tall, pointed hood. She was still alert, in spite of her stoutness and sixty years.

"Good people," she cried, in a voice both mournful and cajoling, "come here and see! Monsieur Maurice returns in good health, but a little weary from the bad roads. Is it not so? But Brownie is so sure-footed. I suppose you met Sylvain with the small carriage under the evergreens? I told him not to be late with your things, but he has taken the Palatries Road, so as to gabble with Simonne; but when one is young one will be young. You are surely very hungry."

During this discourse Maurice Jousserant descended to the ground and gazed by the last rays of twilight at the old dwelling of Ages, with its black walls; its steps overhung with budding fig trees, and the arched door, held open by two servants, curious to behold the young master who has returned after an absence of five years from his country. He rapidly greeted the good woman, and together they entered the house. In the dining-room, where the windows were open upon the garden, Mother Jacquet had prepared the supper. In this great room, paved in brick and panelled in

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chestnut wood, arose a damp odor, which comes especially from apartments which are for a long time uninhabited; but a bright fire of cornhusks flamed in the chimney and refreshed the eye. Maurice seated himself and began to eat, but weariness had without doubt taken away his appetite, and after several mouthfuls he put down his napkin, and turned to the miller's wife, who regarded him with an air of commiseration.

"Mother Jacquet," said he, "I encountered, not far from Ages, a boy, rather small and thin in stature, and poorly dressed. His dog made a mistake and sprang at the throat of my horse. Perhaps you know him?"

"What! do I know him?" exclaimed the miller's wife, "it can be none other than Chantepie's boy, the old miller of Ages, whom your father put out of the gate in his time."

Maurice's face darkened. "Jack Chantepie," he murmured. "I should have been able to guess it; but I thought he had gone to be a soldier?"

"Yes, Monsieur Maurice, but he returned to these parts at the end of seven years, and one can well say that he and his dog are the most miserable beasts within three leagues of here. He never even takes a journey without passing the mill; he hates your family, he hates my husband

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who replaced his father; he hates Sylvain and all the people around Ages. I often say to Jacquet: 'Some day that boy will bring trouble to us.' If one could only make him go away from the place—but he is a protégé of the *Cueilleux d'herbes*, who buys rare birds and all kinds of curious animals from him, which he catches in a trap."

"The *Cueilleux d'herbes*," repeated Maurice with surprise; and instantly he thought of the unknown man whom he saw botanizing along the hill of the Hermitage.

"Yes, the *Cueilleux d'herbes*; that is the name which has been given here to Monsieur Désenclos," repeated the old woman, smiling.

"Monsieur Désenclos," said the young man brusquely.

"Monsieur Désenclos, of Poitiers, who married Mademoiselle Lucile des Pouteyes, of St. Clementin. My dear Monsieur Maurice, do you no longer remember Mademoiselle Lucile?"

Maurice waited a moment in silence. "But," he replied, "doesn't Monsieur Désenclos live at St. Clementin?"

"It is more than four years since he has lived at Palatries; he bought the place after the death of old Depuir, tore down the ancient dwellings, and replaced them with a beautiful house, all

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brick and stone, with slate roofs. Look; one can see the gables glistening in the moonlight."

She forced Maurice to approach the window, and pointed with her finger in the direction of St. Clementin. The distant gables peered over the poplars and seemed plated with silver in the soft moonlight.

While the young man appeared to be observing them with attention, the miller's wife continued: "Ah, Monsieur Maurice, it is the most beautiful place in the country. Monsieur Désenclos has spent a mountain of money, and only to lay out gardens, because his young wife loves flowers. Poor dear, she could not be pleased at Poitiers, and almost died of ennui; but since she has been at Palatries she has regained her color and is as fresh as a white-heart cherry. She also seems as young as when she came to Ages with her father. You remember her, Monsieur Maurice; she was the little girl who, when only five years old, had the manners of a young lady."

"Has she any children?" asked the young man, without turning his eyes from the roofs of Palatries.

"One daughter only, but so lovely. Ah! beautiful like her mother. There is nothing about her that resembles her father. God have mercy! I

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would not say anything evil of Monsieur Désenclos; he is good as bread; but, you know, Monsieur Maurice—" and she struck her forehead, "he is a hairbrained creature; always in the roads and paths breaking stones and gathering all kinds of little plants, especially since he has been cajoled by that contemptible boy of Chantepie's. He wants to marry Simonne, the lady's maid of Mme. Désenclos, and the sweetheart of our Sylvain. She is a pretty girl, and has some property of her own, without counting that the Madame is her godmother. Our Sylvain is in love with her."

Maurice did not hear her, but taking the lamp, said good-night to the old servant. Entering his room, he lighted a cigar, and resting his arms on the window he leaned out of it. The melancholy roar of the river came to his ear, and from the distant gables of Palatries, which were lighted by the moon, came the song of a nightingale. As he looked out upon the unchanged landscape, Maurice seemed to experience a resurrection of his infancy and childhood. A crowd of phantoms passed before his eyes, but two figures detached themselves and stood out more clearly than the rest; two distinct personalities—Jack Chantepie and Lucile. By what singular coincidence had Jack been the first person he encountered on his return, and so



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near his own domains? Jack, an enemy whose hatred dated from the days of their childhood!

Maurice remembered an evening on the heath when they were returning from school, that he and Jack had a quarrel. The miller's son had the upper hand and rolled his little master in the muddy wheel-tracks. Maurice returned to Ages in a pitiable state, and a farmer's wife, having witnessed the scene, recounted it all to his father. Monsieur Jousserant took him silently by the hand and led him to the home of the miller. All that had passed now came vividly to his memory; he saw the sombre looking place, lighted by the rays from a dim rosin candle, and the miller with his ragged, powdered clothes, his face flaming, and his eyes cruel and black. Chantepie was eating his supper. Jack was in a corner munching a piece of bread, and casting savage glances here and there. The miller rose, after Monsieur Jousserant made his complaint, took a switch, and seizing Jack by the collar whipped him without mercy. The blows fell hard. The boy paled, his lips pressed tight, and received them without uttering a gasp; but his eyes showed anger and menace. Since then, every time Maurice had met Jack, he looked at him with the same hatred. The old miller being turned from the mill, hung himself

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on a tree in the woods. Jack became a soldier, and Monsieur Jousserant died. This evening, when it seemed as if old times and events should be forgotten—especially the last vestige of that old hatred—this evening, on the same heath, in the same spot, Jack had appeared, with the same anger in his eye and look of injury about the lips. And it was Monsieur Désenclos who befriended him—the husband of Lucile—the botanist whom he found near the fountain of the Hermitage. The other vision was a pleasanter one. Maurice saw Lucile in a rose-colored dress, when she was eighteen. The day she walked with her father to Ages. What good times and what good talks they used to have together. They were too closely connected to ask if the sympathy they bore for one another were love or friendship. They loved each other without restriction, without other aim than to love and meet as often as possible. Their innocent passion was soon discovered. The vivacity and thoughtlessness seen in the character of Lucile, and the trouble and agitation which possessed Maurice made it visible to the most indifferent eye that love was growing.

The two families were much affected. Although the restless humors and growing will of Maurice partially pleased Monsieur des Pouteyes, the

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modest fortune of Lucile was not sufficient to conquer the repugnance of Monsieur Jousserant. They sent Maurice to Paris, and during his absence, Monsieur des Pouteyes, already old and sick, searched for a husband for his daughter. Monsieur Désenclos was presented; he was rich, a gentleman, and well known about the country. Lucile rebelled for some time, but the conflict wearied her, so she was forced to marry. It is the ordinary conclusion; the old story of the first love suppressed in full bloom. Maurice consoled himself by calling to mind the minutest details of those dear recollections. Five years of excitement and vagabond life had passed over those childish passions, but never had the smiling image of Lucile been effaced. In the most dissipated and troubled hours Maurice had found it in the bottom of his heart like a medallion, whose colors are always fresh. Again this evening the charming apparition of twenty years before was revived, and made him forget weariness and sleep, so that he did not go to bed until late, and then barely closed his eyes.

During the first few days which followed his return, Maurice was occupied in arranging the establishment and regulating his affairs. He rose early in the morning, with the jovial crowing of

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the cock in the poultry yard, and looked with satisfaction upon his mill and its white walls reflected in the river. On going downstairs he loaned a willing but distracted ear to the lamentations of Mother Jacquet, the accounts of the miller, and the frank confidences of Sylvain Jacquet, a big boy of twenty, who never opened his mouth except to sing the charms of Simonne. Little by little he gathered the life of the country, and with these old acquaintances found memories of former days scattered all over the place. The remembrances of Lucile des Pouteyes filtered drop by drop into his brain, like delicious wine, and crowded out all other sensations. In Paris a sort of modesty prevented him from inquiring about her from old friends whom he met, but at Ages he felt the emotions of his first love awakening again. He seemed to see Lucile as she was at eighteen, a gay, capricious child, with flowing hair and laughing lips, and cheeks as fresh as the flowers in May. He still loved her; but he defended himself when he saw it face to face and had good faith.

"I am too happy to recollect it," he wrote to an old friend of his infancy, named Hubert Grandfief, who lived near St. Clementin. "I leave it to the past, and that is all. Five years have made of my romance a bed of ashes, and they have put out

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the flame; but if the love is extinguished, the affection still remains. The day that I meet Lucile I will give her my hand loyally and cordially, as though I were an old comrade."

He waited, but every evening he climbed to the summit of the hill from where one could see Palatrics; always his gaze was directed towards that part of the valley. He would go and sit on a rock overlooking the river, and wait until the time came for the lights at Palatrics to glisten through the trees like golden stars. He felt himself drawn towards the house, yet at the same time was held back by an indescribable fear; neither had he courage to cross the Charente, which separated them. Then came the answer from Hubert. The confidences of Maurice had alarmed him; his mind was strong and clear, and he could read the weakness of his friend's heart. The tone of his letter was firm and rather severe.

"Your passion," said he, "has changed; you no longer love Lucile, but have friendship for her! Is this quite true? In conscience' name, if you were married and one professed a similar friendship for your wife, could you rest in peace? The end of love! but when you speak of her, several words indicate affection. There are certain tunes which one has forgotten, but which come back to

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you all at once if you return to the places where you heard them sung for the first time. The same thing has come to you."

Then he continued to exhort him to defy himself and to resist the temptation of seeing Mme. Désenclos.

"I know that a good time will come," he added, "and if you really have an affection for Lucile, do not expose it to the gossip of St. Clementin. Above all, no visits to Palatrics. When your courage fails you, come and see me. I charge myself to keep you to your firm resolution." The letter was a long one.

"He is a fool," said Maurice, throwing it down with impatience. He took two or three turns, then picked up the letter and reread it slowly. As he read he could see between each line the manly and loyal figure of Hubert Grandfief.

"Well, yes," he mused at the end, "he is right. I will not go to Palatrics."



## **CHAPTER THE SECOND**

### **Concerning an Old Love Affair**





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### CHAPTER II.

ACCORDING to the declarations of Mother Jacquet one seldom encounters a more beautifully situated estate than Palatries. The house, built of stone and brick, in the style of Louis XIII., was erected on the summit of a cone-shaped hill, which widened little by little as it sloped down to the valley of the Charente. The principal façade, overlooking a terrace, was turned towards the east; from the highest windows, which were framed in jasmine, one could embrace with a sweep of the eye the whole space between Ages and St. Clementin, and one would imagine that the steep hill, and the valley with its fields, the river and the woods, all formed one vast park with long perspective.

In this fertile piece of land, abundantly watered by springs and constantly warmed by the sun, the vegetation was wonderful, and all the plants of the south grew vigorously. Lemon and pomegranate trees flourished in full view. In June the magnolias scattered thousands of their white

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rich flowers. During the month of April the large heliotrope blossoms perfumed everything with their delicious odor. Each morning Mme. Désenclos came with her little daughter to sit on the terrace shaded by lindens. Lucile was certainly the queen who was necessary for this beautiful kingdom. Small, delicate, and fair, she had at the age of twenty-four the ingenious grace, the gayness and the careless impetuosity of a very young girl. Her brown eyes were velvety, like the flowers of scabious, her auburn hair fell in rings over her shoulders, her red lips, sometimes turned up in the coquettish pout of a child and sometimes by a smile, expressed a mixture of roguishness and kindness. The rosy mouth and white complexion, and the flitting smile with every glance illumined this mobile face like a ray of sunshine. This was what was so charming in her at first sight. Her little girl, Madeline, aged four, resembled her as the Easter daisy of the field resembles the queen daisy. It was the same skin of blond and milk, the same liquid brown eyes, the same nervous vivacity, and the same mischievous smile.

It was on the terrace that they watched the birds building their nests, and as the little one leaned against her mother's knee, Lucile explained to her

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the secrets of the flowers. She told her that the rose buds were the rose's little children; and that the perfume they exhaled was in return for the care of the rose bush. Madeline listened attentively and her great brown eyes grew thoughtful.

Sometimes, when she wearied of her mother's stories, she would run and chase the many colored butterflies that danced from flower to flower. "See, mamma, the butterflies are blue and yellow like the asters in the garden," she would cry. "I will catch one for you." But they were always too swift for the little feet. When tired of this she would throw herself down on the soft grass and listen to the birds as they sang in the trees above her until the hundred charming sounds lulled her into the land of dreams. The mother watched beside her little one and dreamed also, but perhaps her thoughts were not as happy as her child's.

There was little to vary the monotony of Mme. Désenclos' life, but the care of her beautiful home and her love for Madeline made her forget herself. She did not realize that she was about to be awakened, as if from a dream.

A few days before the arrival of Maurice, Mme. Désenclos was seated in her favorite place, occupied with arranging the flowers in two old Delft

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vases, while her little daughter chased butterflies. Suddenly a rapid step was heard on the gravel of the walk, and Monsieur Désenclos appeared at the entrance of the terrace. The owner of Palatrics kissed the child several times and then approached his wife. He picked up some of the flowers with which she replenished her vases and fumbled with them.

"By the way," said he, "I have some news. Our neighbor, Monsieur Jousserant, returns to the country; they expect him day after to-morrow."

Mme. Désenclos threw the flowers down which were in her hands, her eyes bright and smiling.

"Maurice at Ages," she cried gayly, "what good news. I have always said that he would come back."

Monsieur Désenclos regarded his wife with an air of surprise.

"Then you know Monsieur Jousserant?"

"Certainly! Have I not often spoken of him to you; we have been friends from infancy, and," she added, laughing, "Maurice used to be attentive to me when I still played dolls. I used to ask his advice about my lessons and he scolded me when I read too many love stories. Oh, but he was a queer fellow and a fault-finder. How nice

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to see him again, and what a lot we will have to tell each other."

Monsieur Désenclos no longer listened to his wife; he was deep in the examination of a plant, found among the flowers which were dropped at Lucile's feet. In a few moments he perceived that he had forgotten his magnifying glass, and slowly departed, carrying the precious piece of grass with him.

Lucile leaned with her elbows on the railing and gazed at the valley of the Charente. Her eyes followed the course of the river to Ages. The brown turrets of the old mansion rose above the woody little islands, and sometimes puffs of wind would bring the sound of the mill to Palatrics. There was, all about the young wife—in the yellow grape arbors, the pink hawthorn and the honeysuckle vines,—a voluptuous hum of bees. From the apple trees the pink and white petals detached themselves in the slight breeze, and turning in the air, diffused a sweet perfume of spring.

"Mamma, mamma," cried little Madeline, "it is raining flowers."

With an impetuous movement Lucile took her child in her arms and covered her with kisses, accompanying her caresses with tender words.

"You are my darling," she said, "my adora-

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tion." And the kisses rained more numerous than before.

Lucile seemed at the moment to be surrounded by an atmosphere of tenderness; in her and about her all was joy. Palatrics all in flower, her little daughter so charming, the spring morning so delicious, and Maurice, her friend of former days, Maurice whom she was to see again.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Désenclos, seated under an arbor, was deep in the examination of the plant picked up at the feet of his wife. It was a simple Easter daisy, but it opened to him a world of observation and discovery. Armed with a magnifying glass and pair of small pincers, he studied the minutest details of its organization; his physiognomy, usually grave and diffident to the occurrences of ordinary life, wore an expression of joyous animation and inspired enthusiasm as he worked.

The thoughts which agitated him were not only indicated by the nervous, rapid gestures, but by interjections accentuated, as if he were obliged to respond to an invisible antagonist. He would straddle his scientific hobby-horse and ride at a gallop through the country of hypotheses. He was at this period, passionately absorbed in a psychological question of a certain order of

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scholars, pertaining to the life of plants. His studies in entomology had enabled him to prove with certainty the existence of intelligence in insects, and now he permitted himself to descend a few degrees on the ladder to prove the life, the conscious life of vegetables. This course of knowledge, in which he had traced all stages of animal life more or less apparent, had suddenly been exhausted; the organization of the plant had more analogy than that of an animal. Was it a marvelous machine, or a being sensible and intelligent? Had it a soul? These were the difficult problems which occupied Monsieur Désenclos, and which had taken up a great place in his life. The patient and minute experiments, particularly on sensitive plants, had already given him a peep at a ray of truth. He did not hold to the certainty of it, but he had presentiments. The life of this Easter daisy, whose flowers opened in the sun and closed in the shade, had opened a new road to his explorations, and he penetrated it with the ardor of a convinced searcher. After a long analysis, which lasted almost an hour, he rose joyously, and waved the little flower victoriously above his head; he had established a new proof in defence of his hypothesis. Proudly and gladly he tramped the turf of his lawn; he was perfectly



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happy, and like his wife, he found the blue of the sky splendid, the apple trees beautiful, and the morning delightful.

Lucile was resting under the lindens on the terrace; her eyes always turned towards Ages, and her thoughts were of Maurice's return. A more experienced and wiser woman would have been startled at this sudden awakening, and would have asked herself if the old love were extinct, and if the presence of Maurice had not its embarrassments and dangers. Lucile never dreamed of it. She rejoiced that her friendship had not decreased, without trying to discover if there was not something more between them, as she had no skill or experience in such matters. She had retained at twenty-four the illusions, the naïvetés, the capricious humors, independent and almost savage, which came to her with her exceptional education. Her mother had died while bringing her into the world; the father, an old magistrate, very learned and busy, was taken up with his journeys between the bench and his office, and was not occupied with his daughter except to spoil her. She had been brought up in one of the most solitary houses in St. Clementin, by an old nurse, and a goat as fantastic and wild as herself. She was never sent to a convent, but a music teacher and

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a college professor had charge of her education, which was completed by several books, chosen a little at random from her father's library. There was, in this education, an enormous vacancy, which the counsel and devotion of a mother alone could supply. Lucile knew nothing of life. She had never gone out in the world except a few times to balls, given by the bourgeoisie at St. Clementin.

The sole event of her girlhood had been her meetings with Maurice, and the great friendship which followed. After her marriage, Monsieur Désenclos, without ceasing from his study of insects and plants, had brought her to a new kind of solitude, where he treated her like a child and continued to spoil her as her father had done. Before she went to live at Palatries, she only knew intimately one neighbor in the country—a widow, named Mme. de Labrousse—a person light and frivolous, who could teach her but little of the seriousness of life. Having been long without the society of women, Lucile knew nothing about the little feminine artifices, and ignored the art of calculating beforehand upon her actions, and failed to conduct herself according to the rules of worldly etiquette. She had grown and bloomed like the neglected flowers in her father's garden, and we hope to good fortune. She was a strange

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child, sensible and generous, but at times naughty and spoiled. She imagined that it sufficed to extend her hand to gather a mulberry bush along the road. She was, in a word, marvelously organized to be exposed to the common dangers of life, throwing her heart and reputation to be carried away by the winds as a sacrifice.

Three days later Simonne announced to Mme. Désenclos that Monsieur Jousserant had returned to Ages. Sylvain Jacquet had come at break of day to spread the news at Palatrics, and Simonne, wholly occupied with her new love, could not exhaust the subject of Maurice and the people at the mill.

"Then you love Sylvain," said Lucile gaily, "while Monsieur Désenclos wants you to marry Chantepie; to think of you with two lovers; take care, my girl. Chantepie is jealous."

"But I could not marry such a vagabond as he," replied Simonne; "Sylvain is a good worker and a fine boy. Do you know what he told me, Madam? That Monsieur Jousserant has returned to the country for good, and that he is greatly improved. He is more lively and talkative than in past times. He is going to alter the mill himself, and Sylvain is to take the place of Father Jacquet, who is getting old."

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When Simonne left her Lucile looked out of the window and saw that the valley had an air of festivity. The old towers of Ages appeared yellow above the fresh verdure of the lindens. The river seemed to sing aloud a hymn to the return of Maurice, and he was without doubt at that moment behind its green banks, coming and going along the Charente, remembering old places, and dreaming perhaps of former times. She had not forgotten him or the past days. Sometimes it seemed to Lucile as though the eighteen years were not finished; that she had been sleeping since then; that the awakening had come, and she was going to begin life anew at the place where she left it on the day of Maurice's departure. Maurice—the name rang strangely in her ear. Without doubt he would come and make his visit at Palatries to-morrow, perhaps, or the day after, and already she dreamed of the welcome she would give him and all they would have to tell each other. The next day and the one following came, two weeks ran by, and Maurice Jousserant did not appear at Palatries. It was something not to be thought of. Had he already gone away again?

No, Maurice was at Ages, but he promised himself to resist courageously the temptation and he kept to his word. The wise remonstrances of

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Hubert Grandfief had not been wasted; he had exhorted him with all his power, and Maurice tried his best. During the morning he imposed upon himself long tasks, which forced him to remain in the same place; but when the evening came, he went out, compelled to take exercise, and his walks were limited to a long circle about Palatrics. Only one day the circle narrowed, and the road chosen for the return approached nearer and nearer to the home of Lucile. An evening towards the end of the third week, Maurice took, to go back to Ages, a crooked path, which at first sight appeared to lead to the bottom of the valley; so he followed with confidence the descent of the green lane, bordered with tall hawthorn trees. All at once he came out on a long avenue of walnut trees leading to an arched door and high wall; he recognized Palatrics.

Maurice stopped, but before retracing his steps he went to the gate for just one moment, to gaze at the house to which fortune had brought him. At the same instant the door opened and Mme. Désenclos appeared on the threshold. She gave one hand to her little girl and in the other carried a brown sandstone pitcher, which she was going to fill at a neighboring spring noted for the clearness of its waters. Maurice waited, immov-

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able, and his heart beat violently. She was there before him—his sweetheart of former days, the Lucile of his earliest dreams. What would he not give to take her hand and speak to her, to hear that fresh voice, which he had not heard for such a long time. She advanced slowly, regulating her steps to those of her little girl and lowering her eyes so as not to meet the glance of Maurice, whom she had quickly recognized. When she thought she was near him she raised her head, but saw him hurry away and disappear suddenly at the end of the avenue. He had strength to the end and escaped, astonished and desolate at the amount of his courage.

Lucile paled. There was no more doubt this time; he would not only not come to Palatries, but he ran away so as not to see her. She sat down near the fountain and gazed mechanically at the pitcher, empty and glistening at the bottom. She remained sitting there a long time, when all at once the light formed circles on the calm surface of the water. What had caused them? The wings of an insect or the dropping of a tear?

"Mamma, mamma," said little Madeline, finally.

Lucile dipped her bare arms into the water, and rose with the pitcher flowing over, and slowly she returned to Palatries.

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Désenclos, and this time he did not run away, but went in front of her with extended hand. He seemed to see Lucile smile, and hear her soft voice, clear and bell-like. Then, falling into the reality, he cursed his ridiculous flight, and would continue to dream new dreams. This was the occupation of his whole night.

He dreamed again the next day when he went out to the lodge. He returned to the avenue of walnuts, but he did not dare advance towards the fountain, and retraced his steps after taking another look at the entrance to Palatries. As he was returning, deep in thought, along a narrow path which crossed the fields, he suddenly heard a woman's voice pronounce his name. He lifted his head and perceived between the branches of a hedge of medlar trees the long curls and mocking face of his neighbor, Mme. de Labrousse. At Maurice's look of astonishment she burst out laughing, pushed aside the hedge, and first her straw hat and then her head appeared.

Mme. Céсарine de Labrousse was a woman of sharp wit; plumb, active, and petulant, with the airs of a coquette. She was over forty, but with her fair hair and clear complexion, she could easily pass for thirty-five. A rich widow, in robust health, she had a continual smile on her lips, and

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feet ever ready to go on a pleasure trip. She was egotistical, and without being really bad, sufficiently vain, careless and talkative to do a great deal of harm in a natural way, like the brambles which prick.

At St. Clementin people often gossiped about her statements. Her best friends avowed that she was a coquette, the indifferent declared her fickle, and her enemies said positively that she had set her cap at the mill.

"Good day, Monsieur Jousserant," she said, ironically to Maurice, "were you coming to make me a visit? It is nearly time."

The young man, greatly embarrassed, excused himself as best he could; but the widow, after vehemently reproaching him for his unfriendliness, pretended that she would quarrel with him if he did not promptly make up for his neglect.

"Promise me," she said, "to come to me on Thursday night. We are going to angle for crawfish by torch-light, and have supper in the open air. I have invited all St. Clementin, and we are to have Monsieur and Mme. Désenclos from Palatrics. I shall count on you."

They separated, and Maurice returned to Ages cursing his cowardice. He would not miss going to



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Commanderie, where Mme. de Labrousse lived, the following Thursday.

When he arrived, at dusk, the guests had already gone to the fields, but he looked in vain among them for Mme. Désenclos. The fishing began. The young girls lighted the lanterns and suspended them from the willow trees along the river. The young men fixed the bait and plunged the weights in the water. Mme. de Labrousse monopolized Maurice, and they promenaded under the massive willows on the pretext of watching the fishers. She supported herself on his arm, and as the ground was rough, for fear of making false steps, she clung to her cavalier and uttered peals of laughter which grated upon Maurice's nerves.

The night had fallen. All at once an unexpected light glistened among the chestnut trees and appeared to move towards the edge of the water. They heard footsteps and voices approach nearer and nearer. "I think it is Mme. Désenclos," cried the coquettish widow, dropping Maurice's arm and running toward the newcomers. Waiting alone the young man leaned against a willow tree and his heart commenced to beat. He soon distinguished a light dress midst the blackness of the chestnuts, and he listened to these words, pronounced by a fresh silvery voice:

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"It is I. I am late, because Mr. Désenclos returned very tired from one of his excursions, and has gone to rest, begging me to make his excuses. The president came for me, but he did not know the way through the fields, and we almost fell in the water twice."

Maurice saw Lucile, on the arm of the old president, coming towards him accompanied by Mme. de Labrousse.

"I must find my cavalier," said the widow.

"Who is he?" said a soft voice.

"Monsieur Maurice Jousserant."

"Ah!"

Maurice felt himself turn pale.

"This time," he thought, "I will repair my folly." She was not more than two steps from him, and he approached her, saying in a joyous but trembling voice, "Good evening," at the same time his hand extended towards hers.

"Good evening, Monsieur," she replied, in a shy tone and, turning her back, ran in the direction of the girls who were throwing the fish lines.

Maurice remained stupefied a moment; then realizing the absurdity of his position regained his *sang froid*, and addressed his words afresh to Mme. de Labrousse.

The fish were abundant, and when, at nine

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o'clock, the nets were hauled in, they were overflowing. The party returned to Commanderie, where they were awaited by the older people, who were not tempted by the walks, and they all joined together in an endless game of "Boston." The supper was very gay, and Maurice, whom the widow had placed at her right, held an animated conversation with her which amounted to nervous gaiety, astonishing the guests. Only once he gave a furtive glance towards Mme. Désenclos; she was seated near a window, and every few minutes gazed at the garden with an air of ennui. When they separated it was nearly midnight. The people from St. Clementin, preceded by their servants carrying lanterns, escorted Mme. Désenclos to Palatrics. On the way there was nothing but gossip about Maurice.

"But he has become agreeable," said the notary's wife; "he was so unsociable before."

"Well, well," insinuated the notary, "Mme. de Labrousse finds him to her taste; she has set out afresh for him."

"Césarine is so coquettish," replied his wife.

"And so unwise," murmured an old maid.

"Bah!" replied the president, "it is a pretty woman who pulls the last cracker of her fireworks,

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and bad luck when she chooses Maurice Jousserant for her nosegay."

"Fie! how terrible," cried the ladies.

On arriving at the door of Palatries, Mme. Désenclos hurriedly said "Good night" to her companions, and hastened to enter. Everyone was quiet in the house. She ascended to her room, where she slept next to her child, and shut herself in. A keen vexation agitated her. She was discontented with her evening, with herself, and with others. She reproached herself for having received Maurice so rudely, and she did not want him to bear her greeting with so much philosophy. She recalled the coquetries of Mme. de Labrousse and the compliments and animation of Maurice Jousserant. For the first time in her life she felt jealous.

"Men are strange," she said to herself while arranging her hair before the glass; "how can one fall in love with a woman over forty who has red hair and irregular features."

She found the conduct of Maurice inexplicable. What ill will could he have against her? She had received him coldly, it is true; but had she not a right to, after his running away the other time; and besides, was it not his duty to divine that the frowning looks were not serious?

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"Oh," she thought, "if I could only have an explanation from him."

She spent the rest of the night dreaming of Maurice, and in the morning she woke to think of him again. Little by little, before she was aware of it, her first love took possession of her heart, like certain deep-rooted plants pulled up from the place where they have been planted. One thinks they are dead, but they are only deeply buried, and the next spring, all at once they sprout out of the ground in verdant shoots, and begin to blossom just as the gardener comes with hot irons to root them out for good.

Maurice returned home tired and unhappy. The life of the country about Ages had for the moment pleased him; now he found it dull, monotonous, insufferable. The unquiet, roaming humor had gotten the upper hand, and he passed the night turning over in his mind plans for long journeys. The next day he announced to Mother Jacquet that he would return to Paris in three days. The miller's wife opened her eyes wide, clasped her hands and uttered endless lamentations. What was going to become of the mill, and how was Sylvain to marry Simonne. They counted on him to overcome the objections of Monsieur

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Désenclos. He hoped that all would be arranged by the day of the *ballade*. "Oh! if Monsieur Maurice would only wait until after the *ballade*."

"What *ballade*!" said Maurice.

"Oh, master, can you have forgotten the *ballade* of Puits-Carré? Everyone goes from Ruffec and from Chanoux, and all St. Clementin will be there. The dancing on the heath, have you forgotten it; the most beautiful women in the country will come and dance."

Maurice was silent, and Mother Jacquet saw that he was moved, so continued:

"Lovely Mme. de Labrousse will be there, and also the young lady from Palatries. Ah! Monsieur Maurice, your friendship for our Sylvain will not let you go before the *ballade*."

"We will see," murmured Maurice in a pensive tone.

Sunday evening Monsieur Désenclos said to his wife, who was enjoying the coolness of the terrace: "Well, our neighbor, Monsieur Jousserant, is already tired of the country. He has had enough of Ages and intends to leave for Paris after the *ballade* of Puits-Carré."

Lucile remained silent and continued to gaze at the garden; but in the bottom of her heart, while

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Monsieur Désenclos was speaking, an impetuous sentiment agitated her.

"Oh," she said to herself, "I cannot let him go thus."

## CHAPTER THE THIRD

Concerning the Ballad of Puits-Carré





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### CHAPTER III.

THE heath of Puits-Carré appeared in its most beautiful dress when the sun of Pentecost Monday sent forth its first salute. The downs spread their soft, damp turf a long way off from this bluish verdure, the oasis of heather and prickly broom was faintly separated. Here and there an old chestnut tree, with hollow trunk, twisted its still vigorous branches and extended them over the magnificent greenness of the smooth ground. At the first ray of sunshine there was over all the silent heath a certain sparkle. A lark darted up from a tuft of broom, and beating its wings, rose singing towards the clear blue sky. A second took flight, then a hundred others followed them, and the silence was succeeded by joyous music, which seemed to fall from the heights of heaven.

This was the signal for the awakening of life. Soon one heard the rolling of wheels along the green roads, and a few steps off the measured tread of oxen drawing wagons over the heath, loaded with tables, benches and tents—indispensable articles

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at a *ballade*. The cart drivers, now in full view, were tying up their curtains and depositing their provisions for the day; quarter casks of beer, puncheons of Angoumois wine, quantities of tontis-saux and craquilins, Ruffec cheeses tasting like nuts, little eels from the Charente all ready to be fried. On four casks, under the shadow of a chest-nut tree, the manager of the ball had established his orchestra. Not far off the dentists and quack doctors fixed their movable houses.

Little by little every green road introduced its contingency. Soon there were mules from Linazais trotting in line, and guided by a clown in a blue blouse, then came bulls walking quietly along, but guarded by a boy who tried to anger them until they bellowed; next a person riding on a donkey, between two baskets of fresh cherries, or an old farmer from Confolens, still wearing a three-cornered hat, short breeches and a coat of drugget, who balanced himself gravely on his horse. A little girl in a woolen cape, driving before her a flock of geese; an old woman, with a back as crooked as the blade of a pruning hook, dragging beside her two reluctant nanny goats; and everywhere groups of threes or fours. Arriving from all parts were young people who wished to hire themselves out. They were all in their Sunday

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clothes and wore, as a distinctive sign, a sprig of green, the girls at their waists and the boys in their hats. This *ballade* was at the same time, a fête, a market, and a place to engage domestics. At Poitou the servants were engaged once a year, in the month of September, on Saint Michel's Day; but this hiring was above all, reserved for the people who worked by the day during the harvest season.

At mid-day the heath was all commotion and noise; the toppers gathered together around the saloons; the clowns and their customers questioned each other, the quacks commenced their healing on a great number of diseases and broken blisters. Neighings, plaintive bleating, shrill sounds, the flourish of trumpets, songs, screams from women and cries from marmosets, all mingled together in a strange concert. Soon the violins and the hurdy-gurdies gave the signal for the ball to commence.

At the same hour, Simonne in her best clothes left Palatrics, and set out towards Ages. The moment she put her foot on the country road she heard a little cry, and saw a movement in the rear. Jack Chantepie was behind her. He had not made any toilet, his beard was in disorder and his shirt torn, his face wore its usual savage expression.

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With his fine features and air of intelligent vivacity, this boy had a disagreeable aspect. The lines of his aquiline nose and mouth were clear and firm, his forehead was low, his brown eyes were large and without fire, but the thick lids half covered them, and their glances were, I know not why, tawny and oblique.

"Oh, Simonne," he said in a rude voice, "I have frightened you. You look very fine this morning ; it is apparent you are going to the *ballade*."

"Apparently," replied the young girl, and tried to pass on.

"And," he continued, barring the road, "you count on taking with you, in passing, the fine miller of Ages, Sylvain Jacquet?"

"Why should I not take him if he offers me his company? He has a good enough reputation for one not to blush, as one must, if seen with you."

"Say at once that you love him," cried Jack, in a concentrated rage.

"I have no account to render to anyone ; but aside, who can hinder me from liking him? I have made no promises up to this evening."

"Are you quite sure of it, Simonre? It does not suffice to say it, 'I have made no promises.' There are actions and looks which are more binding than words. When we danced at the ball of

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the *ballade* last year, and I took you back to Palatry in the evening, I never thought you would change so perceptibly. It was not a question of Sylvain only, but since the return of the master of Ages the wind has changed."

"If I have changed," replied Simonne quickly, "you also have changed. I would gladly give my promise to a fine man ready to do honor to his wife, but I will not to a poacher, who cannot earn bread for his children."

"You like better a slave from the mill, obliged to lower his head to his master."

"I like best a fellow who works; laborer or servant is of no importance."

Chantepie remained pensive a moment, then devouring her with his gaze and hitting the ground with his stick, he said: "Good-bye, Simonne," and departed across the fields.

Simonne found Mother Jacquet at the entrance of the mill; Sylvain, dressed from head to foot in brown jean, impatiently promenaded the length of the walk. They set out together towards Puits-Carré.

When they arrived on the heath the *ballade* was in all its glory. The toppers pressed around the tables, sang at the top of their lungs, and under the chestnut trees the dancers skipped about with

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all the strength of their legs. Those whom the young men had already engaged for partners, they procured for the dance. It was for all, the last day of liberty, and for many it was the last day passed in the country amidst beings and objects which affection or association had rendered dear. Tomorrow they must go away to distant farms, where all would be strange to them. Also as if they knew it was their last day of joy; they trampled with love on this land. They were intoxicated with drink, with the air and with the sun.

Towards four o'clock, when the warmth of the day began to decrease, the better class of people from St. Clementin arrived in their turn. Various societies, or rather circles, made groups apart, mutually keeping at a distance, and forming small parties around the green ball room. Mme. Césarine de Labrousse was the center around which the flowers of St. Clementin aristocracy were assembled. Mme. Désenclos had come to Puits-Carré with her husband and daughter. Monsieur Désenclos held the child by the hand, and from time to time when they passed anything of interest, carried her in his arms. The mistress of Palatries followed them, often turning her head as if looking for someone in the crowd, and continually making a pretty *moue* in token of disappointment. The

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walk had colored her cheeks and made her eyes sparkle. She was really charming. Her straw hat, from under which hung abundant curls, shaded prettily her childish face. The wind played with her hair and with the blue ribbons which floated from her simple nankeen dress. Hidden behind a chestnut tree, Maurice Jousserant watched and admired her, for he had also come. From his window he had seen Lucile crossing the fields of Ages, and entirely regardless of good advice, he took his hat and set out for the heath. Was it not necessary for him to keep his promise made to Sylvain? For the first time he could look at Lucile at his ease. She was not at all changed—always the same easy walk and the same delicious smile.

Slowly they approached the dancers, and perceiving Simonne, whom she was searching for, Lucile left her husband, and nearing the chestnut tree she suddenly recognized Maurice. They both blushed and remained silent, the young man bowing timidly, and the young woman beginning to speak to her goddaughter; but at the same instant the orchestra gave the signal for a new dance, Simonne departed, and Maurice and Lucile were left alone near the tree.

They dared not speak or look at each other, or part. Maurice affected an air of coldness and kept



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his eyes down; but his glance followed the slightest movement of the blue ribbons on the dress of his neighbor. He appreciated in silence his good fortune. The violins played a dance characteristic of the country—a sort of lancers, where the couples turn and face each other, separating and going together again. Maurice and Lucile knew the simple rhythm of it well. Often they used to dance together on the same heath. While listening, a certain bar of music startled them both and recalled a thousand little incidents. This time their glances met, and they smiled.

“Would you like to dance?” asked Maurice, growing bold.

“Willingly,” she replied simply.

They took hands and pushed forward in the crowd. As they danced face to face and hand in hand the past was brought to life again; but suddenly the violins ceased.

“Already,” cried Maurice. “It seems as if the dance were shorter now than formerly. The music makes us fly around so fast.”

“If you wish,” said Lucile laughing, “we can also dance a quadrille.”

“I dared not ask you,” he replied.

She looked at him with astonishment. “Why, you used to be brave enough.”

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"Yes, but there are five years between then and now"—he stopped, not knowing what to say. The violins played a *ritornello* and the quadrille commenced.

In the intervals between each figure, as they returned to their place, they looked at each other rapidly, and opened their lips to speak, but remained mute. They had two thousand things to say, yet knew not how to begin. Maurice, because his heart overflowed with tenderness and he wished to shut it up, and Lucile because she felt more timid and embarrassed than she had ever been before. During the minutes which passed, Mme. Désenclos was in despair as to how she could obtain the explanation which she desired. So she decided to speak first, and said to Maurice, hurriedly, without looking up:

"Why have you not been to Palatries? Your forgetfulness gave me pain."

"I have not forgotten you," he replied, "but the reception I received from you at Commanderie made me hesitate. I thought my visit might displease you."

"Why," she demanded quickly, turning her beautiful, expressive eyes upon him.

Maurice felt his heart beat and his head swim; his lips were open to reply:

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"Because I love you and you are no longer at liberty," but he was stopped by a feeling of delicacy and the remembrance of his wise resolutions. The dance interrupted their conversation, and when they found themselves side by side again he remained speechless. However, the moment the quadrille was finished, Lucile, impatient at Maurice's silence, asked if it were true that he intended leaving Ages.

"Yes," he replied, "I return to Paris in a few days."

She looked at him reproachfully. "And yet," she said, "you were going away without coming to see me, after five years?" She uttered the words in a tone of sadness which Maurice could not resist.

"I promise not to leave without bidding you good-bye."

"'Good-bye' . . . do not say those horrid words; but seriously, I count on your visit. I shall have a great deal of pleasure because of those good old times. When shall I see you?"

Maurice did not reply immediately. The thought of meeting Lucile at Palatries, the idea of being presented to Monsieur Désenclos caused him secret displeasure, and he hesitated.

"Do you ever go to the rocks of Chaffaux?" he

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asked finally; and after she had answered him in the affirmative, he continued: "If you like we might take that walk together the next time."

"That would be charming," she replied impulsively, "let us go to-morrow."

It troubled her to think that in accomplishing her desire so quickly she had made what she regarded as being an appointment with Maurice. She realized her imprudence and wished to recall it; but she thought at the same time that Maurice would see in her refusal a mark of defiance and would be offended again. But where was the danger? Had she not taken that walk many times when she was young? Was she not going to take little Madeline with her, and was not Maurice going to leave Ages?

The quadrille was finished. Lucile raised her clear, confiding eyes to him, and with a pretty gesture said: "Thank you, and good-bye."

While Maurice and Lucile were dancing Mme. de Labrousse wandered about the *ballade*. She thought she already had her fingers on Monsieur Jousserant, and she saw with vexation, Mme. Désenclos monopolizing all his attentions. Disappointed and angry, she left her companions, to go and glance at the servants waiting to be hired. Almost all of them were engaged, but here and

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there were several of those who came late, looking for an employer. Amongst them, the widow suddenly saw Jack Chantepie—but transformed and unrecognizable. He wore a new smock-frock, a white shirt, and a large hat with a ribbon, in which was arranged a branch of holly.

Mme. de Labrousse stopped in front of him, and they exchanged rapid glances. The robust appearance, brusque manner and haughty attitude of Chantepie impressed her, and she asked him if he would come to Commanderie as watchman.

"Yes," Jack, replied, in a sullen tone, "but on one condition, that is, if you will take Rougeaud with me?"

"Who is Rougeaud?"

"My dog."

"Go for Rougeaud," said the widow, laughing, "and here are ten francs in advance. I will expect you to-morrow."

The bargain concluded, Jack went straight to Simonne, and said, "Do you know what I am going to do? I have just been engaged as watchman by Mme. de Labrousse. Now we will have a dance together."

"I cannot," she replied; "I have a partner."

"Who?"

"Monsieur Maurice Jousserant," she exclaimed

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proudly, and Maurice, true to the promise he had made to Sylvain, advanced towards the young girl.

"He again," growled Jack, turning his back on Simonne and casting an angry look at Maurice.

Little by little the twilight fell and the crowd decreased. The violinists were weary and the dances proceeded slowly. At dusk they ceased entirely. The last carriage started on the road and disappeared under the fig trees. The heath became lonely and silent. The night shed its soft rosy light on the heather, and the trampled grass revived.

Maurice, alone and with slow steps, returned to Ages by the longest road. Like the sleeping herbs, which sprout up again, his love, half dead, had come to life, and as the crickets shook their little bells by the light of the moon, his most joyous memories were awakened and sang in his ears like a nightingale.

The next morning when opening her window Lucile saw that the sky was gray and stormy looking. She had reflected during the night on her promise to Maurice, and regretted an engagement made so lightly; she reassured herself by thinking that it would rain and free her from embarrassment; but at noon the mist cleared and a pale sun

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glistened over the valley. Monsieur Désenclos had gone on a botanical excursion and would not return until nightfall. She was at liberty to go out, as no one ever inquired concerning her walks which she often took alone about the country. Without doubt, Maurice, on the strength of that ray of sunshine, was awaiting her at the rocks. If she did not appear would he not have the right to be offended at this lack of keeping her word? A new ray of light decided her. She gave up taking the little girl on account of the dampness, and started out across the fields to the rocks of Chaffaux.

The air was warm, almost heavy. The sky, mottled with white and blue, had a soft appearance to the eye. From time to time a rapid beam of light would illumine the fields and show them in the splendor of full blossom. The thick blackberry bushes spread as if they wished to crowd out the boxthorn and the trunks of the trees under whose verdure they grew. A light cloud of flower dust perfumed the air, and thousands of insects hovered over the flowering quick-grass. The entire meadows were nothing but a delicious buzz. The sounds, the colors, and the perfumes formed a concert, an invitation to happiness and love. Lucile, while walking, felt the effect of the springy sur-

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roundings. Her hesitancy disappeared, and she hastened onward to her destination.

A league up the river from Ages the Charente is bordered on the left by a forest, and on the right by high rocks overgrown with ivy. The valley narrows and seems like a deep passage of verdure, from where one can only see green trees and a patch of blue sky. The dropping of the water caught in the bushes along the banks, two or three chattering water-fowls, and the shepherd girls constantly moving about, were the only sounds in this solitude. Those who wish to dream at liberty, those who love nature, wild and beautiful at the same time, will find here a landscape to their liking. The river winds in and out between clumps of alder trees; an ancient dam half in ruin, and sloping down, permits one to climb from the rocks without wetting one's feet. It was here that Maurice awaited Lucile. Devoured with impatience he walked along the bank, tramping under foot the grass, and climbing the rocks, yet without calming his emotions. The sky became cloudy and a light shower moistened the plants.

"Curse the rain," he thought, and sat down on a rock discouraged. Suddenly, no, it was not an illusion; it was a brown umbrella which seemed to run in and out under the willows. He recog-



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nized the straw hat and grey dress of Lucile. The young woman advanced with swift, light feet along the little path under the great trees. Maurice hastened to meet her.

"You see," she said, shaking several raindrops which rolled down her skirt, "I am a true friend, and a shower does not frighten me."

They sat down under the shelter of the rocks and remained silent. They seemed astonished to find themselves alone in this retreat, from where one can only see the wet fields through the willows glistening in the sunshine. Wherever they rested their eyes the least detail of the landscape brought back a thousand memories of their youth long ago. They had come to the same spot together one rainy morning in June. Maurice recalled it and so did Lucile. They had taken a long way around the fields and when they reached the rocks and sat down under them, the bare arms and neck of the little girl were all scratched by the débris which the wind and rain had collected.

Gradually the slightest incidents of their childhood became interwoven with their conversation, like lines of poetic quotation. They thought they were again in the past, and the illusion did not cease until the name of Monsieur Désenclos appeared on the lips of his young wife, bringing them

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suddenly to reality. Maurice became pensive; the light which for the moment had illumined his face, disappeared.

"Are you happy at Palatries?" he asked quickly.

She smiled; "I think so, if happiness consists in living in calm and ease. Of course I often have my hours of weariness." She also spoke to him of her inner life. She was almost always alone at the house. Her husband spoiled her like a child and would not let her wish for anything; but he was crazy over natural history, going eight leagues for a plant and not returning until night.

"Have you not a little girl?" said Maurice.

"Yes, thank God," and Lucile's face brightened. "She is all my life, that child. You must see her when you come to Palatries. She is so sweet and lovely."

Maurice raised his head and looked at her sadly. He was going to try and make her understand as delicately as possible why he could not meet the master of Palatries, but she did not give him time; interrupting him intentionally, she cried, "See, the beautiful honeysuckle down there, the other side of the water. Let us go down and gather a bunch."

She ran lightly towards the river and crossed it by the dam. She skipped over the rocks like a shepherd girl. At one spot where the current wide-

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ly separated the two sides, she stopped and hesitated. Maurice ran up to her and offered to carry her over.

"Not in that fashion; give me your hand." With one bound they landed together on the opposite bank. Maurice retained Lucile's fingers in his burning hands, but she rapidly disengaged them and commenced to pick the flowers. Honey-suckle, verbena, foxglove, all that she could find. She took off her hat; her hair floated at liberty and her eyes sparkled. When she had finished, she dropped down on the grass like a beautiful bird, and talking gayly, proceeded to arrange her bouquet. Maurice, most of the time silent, regarded her with admiration, and drank in every word. He inhaled the sweet odor of violets which issued from Lucile's clothes, with delight, and sometimes he would shiver and be tempted to cover her feet with kisses. Meanwhile the sun was sinking slowly towards the woods. Lucile arose.

"What a pity to leave," sighed Maurice; "it is so lovely here."

"Oh," said Lucile, happy to grant the desire half expressed under his regret, "I am not obliged to return till this evening, and if you wish we can go back slowly by the wood and heath."

They took a sandy path, shaded by the branches

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of the chestnut trees, and on their way continued to speak of their childhood. As they walked along, their conversation became very familiar and tender. Not a word of love was pronounced, but their affection was shown in their smiles and in the inflection of their voices.

The twilight fell as they came out upon the heath; long grey shadows crossed the sky. A fine mist arose from the valley and hovered over the hills. Before fading, a last rose hue pierced it and threw over the heather a fantastic light, by which objects seemed to float about like ghosts of the past. Far off in the fields a herdsman sang an old refrain in a slow and sonorous voice:

*“Rossignol sauvage,  
Rossignol des bois,  
Apprends-moi ton ramage  
Apprends-moi la manière  
Dont on se fait aimer.”*

“What a lovely evening, is it not?” said Lucile; and talking together they began to run through the heather, but stopped at the foot of a tree, laughing and breathless.

“I would be so happy,” she said, “if you would not go away.”

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"I will do anything you wish," cried Maurice, intoxicated.

He seized her hands and covered them with kisses.

The young woman started back quickly.

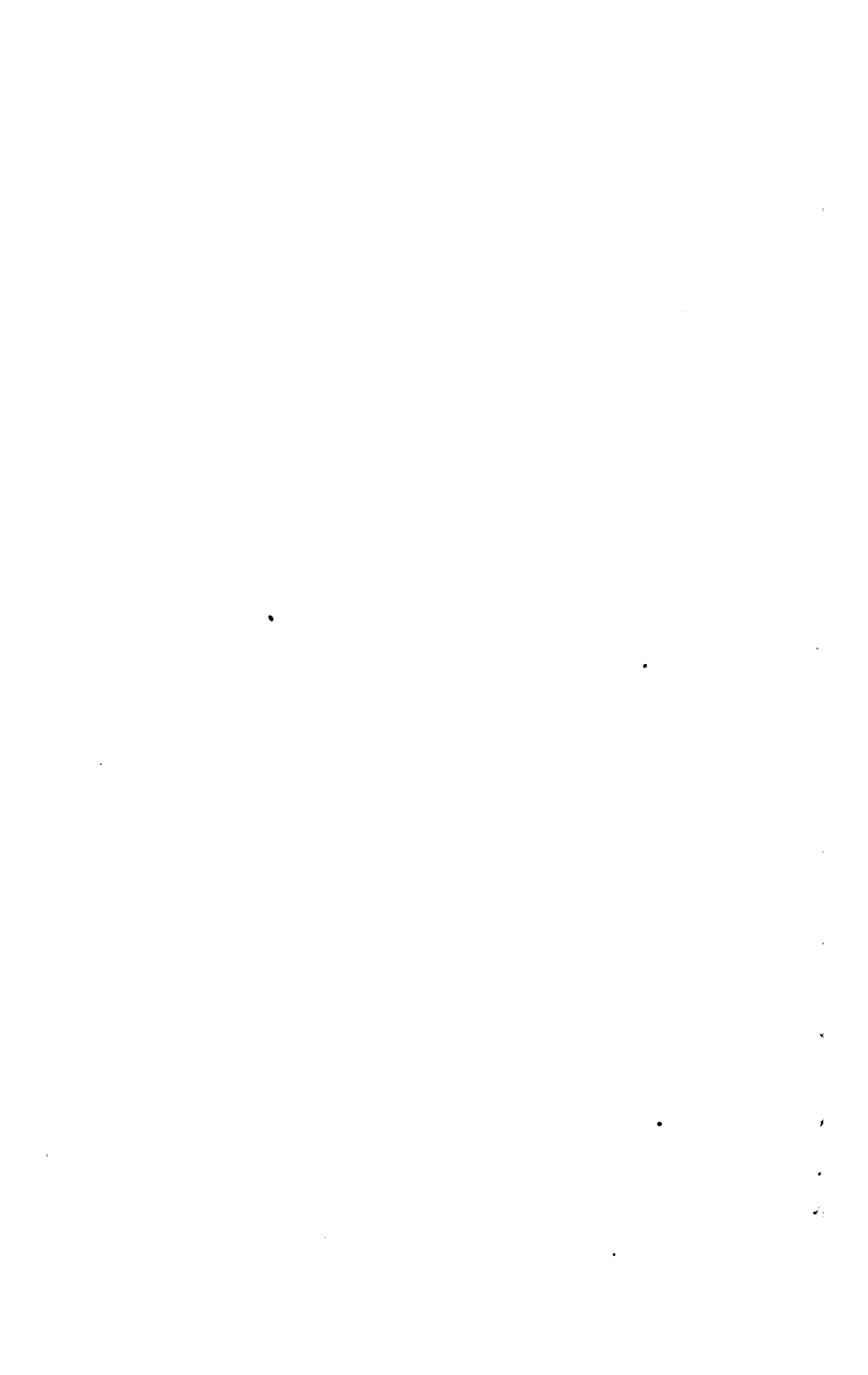
"Now I have displeased you and you will *not* trust me," he said timidly.

"No, my friend," she replied, "have I not confidence in you?"

She extended her little hands to him again and pressed his with nervous haste.

## CHAPTER THE FOURTH

Concerning an Old Wife's Tongue



## A Mistress of Many Moods.

### CHAPTER IV.

THE same night, at the same hour, Monsieur Désenclos was crossing the heath of Puits-Carré, returning from his excursion. He was accompanied by Chantepie and his dog, Rougeaud. The trip had been successful, and the box of the "*Cueilleux d'herbes*" was replenished with precious specimens. He, too, was gay and cheerful. His fine, clear face was lighted with a smile, and he talked joyously with Jack of his travels, and the success of his researches. Chantepie listened to him with an attentive and respectful air. He had for Monsieur Désenclos a sort of worship, like the attachment of a dog for his master and the admiration of a savage for a civilized man.

More than one quarrel he had had with justice, and the influence of the proprietor of Palatries, alone, had saved him from prison; but this was the least among the things which kept him attached to Monsieur Désenclos. Above all that which had touched and conquered him was the science of the *Cueilleux d'herbes* and his love for things of nature.



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Child of the forest and poacher, Chantepie had been charmed and astonished into respect for this bourgeoisie on account of his love of wild plants and insects.

The profound and familiar knowledge of Monsieur Désenclos had inspired in him a feeling of veneration. On the other hand, the master of Palatries perceived the numerous talents of this unappreciated vagabond. He recognized in Jack a thorough experience in the details of forest life and an instructive taste for natural science. In all the country Jack was the only person interested in his discoveries, and in all the district also Monsieur Désenclos was the only one who did not treat Chantepie as an outcast and one justly punished. All these circumstances had helped to attach them to each other more from day to day.

After listening in silence for a long time, Jack lifted his head with a solemn air: "You are a happy man, Monsieur Désenclos," he murmured, "everything comes to you; as for me, I was born with bad luck in the wind."

"Patience, Jack; you will have your turn."

"Never," he said; then added, "only if Simonne will have me for a husband. That girl bewitches me. She had not a word to say when I left the

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heath, after the generous God had put me to service at Commanderie, and now she jeers at me with her miller. Ah! if you would only speak seriously with her, and above all, if Mme. Désenclos would join in, then there might be a little hope. After all, I am worth as much as that dandy, Sylvain. I have two arms, as he has, and if he is better looking than I, I am a bigger dunce than he."

"Well, well, I will speak to my wife," said Monsieur Désenclos; "we will plead your cause; rest in peace; but here is the road which leads to Commanderie. It is here that we separate. Good-night, my friend; courage and patience."

At the same time that Monsieur Désenclos crossed the heath to the road which passes the Hermitage and descends to the valley, Lucile, on the arm of Maurice, was going towards the same path. Suddenly they saw the figure of the master of Palatries standing out black against the horizon.

"There is my husband," cried Lucile, stopping and looking at Maurice, who had turned pale.

"What shall we do," he said, "if he sees us, what will he think of you?"

"There is a very simple thing to do," replied the young wife; "that is, to go naturally on and

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méet him, and I will present you, and he will be the first to laugh at our adventure."

The situation was far from appearing so simple to Maurice. He did not care to find himself face to face with Monsieur Désenclos. He could not help seeing that their plight would betray them. As for her husband, unless he were more blind than other men, his eyes would be opened.

"No," he said in a quiet voice, "that is impossible."

From minute to minute, their position became more critical. Monsieur Désenclos seemed to have noticed the wanderers, and was coming towards them. Lucile, seeing Maurice's serious air, and according to her custom, made a sudden resolution.

"All right; if that is contrary to your ideas, we will save ourselves by hiding behind the heather." She seized his hand, and bending down together, they slipped behind one of the hedges which bordered the path. Monsieur Désenclos passed at the same instant, and paused a moment to contemplate with perplexity the two flying shadows. They stopped when they reached the wood, Lucile laughing at their prank like a child who has played tricks on her teacher.

"Do you think he recognized you?" asked Maurice.

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"I do not think so," she said; "it is already dark."

"But you saw him." Maurice felt cold chills running through his body. "I fear for you," he murmured.

Lucile scoffed at his fear and affirmed anew that he had not recognized them.

"However," she added, "to prevent all suspicion, I will be the first to arrive at Palatrics."

They hastened their steps and followed the path which goes by the mill of Ages without suspecting that there was, behind the furze, another witness of their flight who had recognized them.

When they had disappeared, Jack came from behind the fuze and cast a glance in the direction of the mill. "His wife," he muttered between his teeth. "It is his wife! Alas," he thought, "I was too soon in complimenting him on his good fortune. Always that Jousserant. I am sure to run up against him; there will be a bad hour between us; but patience, I hold a secret which can govern him." Chantepie remained motionless a long time on the heath, then descended towards Commanderie with rapid steps, as if the plan he had made rendered him light of foot.

After being assured that Lucile gained Palatrics in time, Maurice returned to Ages, a slave to

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the fever of anxiety. The house was quiet and he stole to his room with the same precaution as if he were going to do an evil action. His throat pained him, his temples throbbed, and his forehead was damp with perspiration. The night had changed, and exaggerated the circumstances of the day. Maurice's thoughts developed with a strange intensity, and ghostly figures peopled the obscurity in which he was plunged. Towards three o'clock he saw the pale light of the moon shining over the trees. The cocks crowed in the neighboring farmyard and the miller raised the floodgates of the mill, letting the water rush foaming on the wheel. The peasants led their horses to the watering-place, inhaling the fresh air as they passed. Confusion and noise commenced with the dawning light, and Maurice thought sadly of this day, which broke, perhaps, to the disgrace of Lucile. At last weariness came to him through anxiety, and he fell asleep in his armchair.

Eight days passed—eight days of disquiet and remorse. He heard no news of Mme. Désenclos and dared not pronounce her name. He hoped to see her in the neighborhood of Ages, so would not go away. Towards the end of June the fields were mellow and the haymaking began. Often in

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the evening from his window, Maurice saw the carts piled high with hay, rolling slowly toward Palatries. One time he thought he distinguished in the train of haymakers and mowers, the straw hat and light dress of Mme. Désenclos. The wagon was decorated with fig trees, and the workers followed it, singing. It was the last haycock they had to transport, and they carried it with solemnity, celebrating the *berland*; that is to say, the end of the harvest.

Maurice listened to the joyous chorus, the loud noise of the wagons, the snapping of the drivers' whips, and felt reassured and comforted about the life of Lucile. Since she had taken part in the festival, nothing but regrets had come to him. He went out the next day and walked about the fields of Ages. Passing by a hedge he heard two young voices, and recognized Simonne and little Madeline. He ran towards Lucile's child and took her in his arms. Smiling and caressing her he fixed her eyes on this dear little girl who, half pleased and half frightened, cuddled up to his neck. He found the features of the mother in those of the child, covering her with kisses before putting her at liberty to play in the grass. He felt moved; tears filled his eyes, and a good resolution came to his heart.

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"I will leave this place," he said. "I love Lucile and I wish to respect her, so that some day this child will have nothing to curse me for. Yes, I will leave."

He took Madeline again in his arms and covered her face with kisses. Then he returned to Ages, quite decided to depart.

The same night, when Mother Jacquet came to find him, she looked anxious, and spoke in a more plaintive tone than was her custom. "Ah!" she said, "my poor Monsieur Maurice, everything goes from bad to worse. Simonne is on the point of being engaged to that worthless boy, Chantepie, and Sylvain is distracted." She then related to him how Monsieur Désenclos, having shown a moral to Simonne, had finished by deciding her to take her old love. Simonne would say neither "yes" nor "no" to Sylvain, but had danced with Jack the entire evening at the haying festival.

"Alas, alas," sighed the miller's wife, "what will become of Sylvain? He is capable of throwing himself in the pond. Such a fine girl—so economical—and having some good property of her own near Volüme."

"It is a shame!" said Maurice; "but I can do nothing."

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Then the lamentations and weeping recommenced. "Oh," continued Mother Jacquet, between two sobs, "if you would only say a few words to Mme. Désenclos. She can do what she wishes with her husband, and the master of Palatries would fly to the moon if she asked him to."

Maurice arose with an air of impatience and said that he never went to Palatries and would not meddle with the affair.

"Excuse me, Monsieur Maurice," replied the miller's wife, in her most honeyed voice, "I knew no better; I thought that you were always friends with the mistress of Palatries. I thought that ——"

"What did you think?" he cried, coloring, and seizing her arm.

"Oh, master, do not be angry; I thought, like all the people, that you saw the young lady as often as you passed there, and as you went to walk together as far as the rocks of Chaffaux, along the river, I said to myself: 'They were such friends formerly that it cannot have ceased so soon. Time does not get the upper hand of these friendships.' And then I thought if you went to walk with her some day, you could recommend my Sylvain and she would refuse you nothing."

Maurice listened to her with an air of stupe-



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faction. "Enough," he cried. She went away, and left the young man to recover.

"She knows all," he said to himself; "she has seen us and we are at her mercy. If I refuse her my aid, she will ruin Lucile's reputation with a word. I must give up my departure and see Mme. Désenclos as soon as possible; but where and how? Commanderie is the only place where there is a chance of meeting her. I will go there to-morrow."

On seeing him, Mme. de Labrousse uttered an exclamation: "What! Is it you? I thought you were about to become a Trappist," she said.

Maurice excused himself as best he could, saying he would be obliged, perhaps, to return often to Commanderie and use all his power to gain the good graces of the widow. Mme. de Labrousse was charmed with his overtures, which she had not expected, and began afresh her coquetries.

At six o'clock Lucile had not appeared. Maurice said good-bye and promised frequent visits. He went two days later, and Césarine, delighted with his attentions, invited him to dinner for the next day.

When he arrived he found Lucile in the drawing-room. She was very pale and appeared fatigued. Her eyes, more animated and brilliant

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than usual, contrasted strangely with her color, and betrayed violent and internal emotion. She suffered from a malady ignored up to the present time—jealousy. Knowing nothing of the struggles and anxiety of Maurice, and not understanding his persistence in keeping away from Palatries, she supposed that a more lively interest attracted him elsewhere, and she thought of Commanderie. She remembered the fishing party and put together all the incidents of that evening, so painful to herself, until gradually she convinced herself that Maurice shunned her in order to visit Mme. de Labrousse oftener. She had, during the past days, rolled this idea in her diseased mind as one returns a sword to a wound. Owing to the sadness she experienced she realized how great her love for Maurice had become, and tried in vain to tear herself from this tyrannical affection, but every day she saw it grow, and every day her sufferings increased.

A quick flush passed over her cheeks when she saw Maurice enter, but she found sufficient self-control to maintain a calm and indifferent attitude. She was silent and moody during the dinner; when they passed from the dining-room to the garden, Maurice stopped a moment beside her, and asked permission to escort her home. Lucile

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remained silent, and shivering, she could only answer by a nod of the head. Césarine joined them, and Maurice had to endure several hours of impatient waiting. Finally, toward nine o'clock, Lucile arose and desired Monsieur Jousserant to take her to Palatries. The residence of Monsieur Désenclos being on the road to Ages, it seemed quite natural to Mme. de Labrousse, and she accompanied the two young people to the entrance of the garden and gaily bid them "good night."

Lucile refused Maurice's arm, and silently they walked along, side by side. When they were but a hundred steps from Palatries, Lucile said:

"You wished to speak to me; I am listening." She pronounced the words quickly and with a harsh accent.

Maurice recounted to her a few sentences of the conversation he had had with Mother Jacquet and her insinuating allusions.

"See," he said, in finishing, "where my imprudence has brought you. You realize we are forced to submit to the requests of that woman. Could you now succeed in changing the resolutions of Monsieur Désenclos?"

Lucile, after remaining thoughtful a moment, replied briefly that she would alter everything.

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"Be assured," she added, "that nothing vexatious shall happen to spoil your pleasure."

Maurice looked at her, astonished and grieved. She had slackened her pace, and stood facing the high hedge which bordered the path, and with nervous fingers she tore to pieces the flowers on the bushes. The young man, wounded by the shortness of her response, tried to ask her to explain the motive for her conduct, but she stopped him at the first word.

"Enough," she said; "you do not give me an account of your actions."

"Oh!" he cried, sadly, "you will never understand me."

She raised her brilliant eyes to him, and said with that quickness which was natural to her:

"I understand one thing; that it is your pleasure to give me pain."

"I suffer more than you," he replied.

She was silent, and turned away her head, covering her eyes with her hands.

"Lucile," added Maurice, "let me explain to you." He took her hands and they were wet with tears. "Dear child," he continued, "I am more attached to you than you think."

Lucile, still with averted head, wiped away the tears without speaking. Maurice leaned gently

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over her and his lips were so near her head that he could not resist the temptation of depositing a kiss on it. Her heart swelled to the point of bursting.

"Think," he murmured in a trembling voice, "think, the world is terrible and if we see each other often they will not believe in our friendship, but say that it is love."

"Oh," she cried, "they tell the truth. I love you always."

Blushing with confusion, trembling and eyes still full of tears, she ran towards Palatrics, hurriedly opened the gate and disappeared.

The next day Maurice wrote a long letter to his friend Hubert. He must speak of his love and pour out his heart.

"I have renounced my departure," he wrote. "I am not going away; all is changed, my friend. The sky is blue, the world is beautiful. She loves me. I ought not to say it. I ought to conceal it from you, above all, but my good fortune smothers me. I must speak of it. Do not moralize with me; it is useless. I love her, and the whole world can say that I am wrong, but I will not listen. Do not blame her; Lucile's sincere love is more honest than the cautious women who think themselves so virtuous. If you could have seen

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her last night in the little path near Palatries; if you could have heard her trembling voice; if you could have seen those bright eyes, more glorious than the light of the stars! She cried; those dear tears—and when she slipped away I felt that my whole life belonged to her.

“No, I am not going away; I will remain here near her in this beautiful spot, in this lovely valley of the Charente, where all breathes and sings of love. My destiny is in her hands; whatever comes, her will is mine. My heart beats when hers does, and we love each other in spite of all the world.”

While Maurice wrote these lines, Lucile thought of him, and her soul filled with a delicious emotion. The awakening of love in a young heart is a charming sensation. She experienced a sort of fairy existence. In the evening, when everything was asleep, she went out and sat on the terrace. Slowly, Mme. Désenclos inhaled the freshness of the night and cast a lingering look along the horizon which stretched out before her. In the sky twinkling stars, and on earth a transparent darkness which covered everything, yet through which one could see the clear forms of the trees and hills. In the air was the perfume of honeysuckle and jasmine. All nature was impregnated

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with delicious odors. Lucile forgot the lateness of the hour, and it seemed as if she saw open before her the golden doors of an enchanted world. She listened with rapture to the cry of the cricket in the garden, and then she remembered every word of Maurice's, and took pleasure in singing them over to herself in time with the rustic chant of the cricket. The infatuation of her heart mounted to her cheeks, and turned them red, as the sap mounts in the young water willows and colors them also, during the month of March.

The day following her conversation with Maurice, Lucile occupied herself with the marriage of Simonne. The young girl, who at the bottom was really attached to Sylvain Jacquet, was easily converted to the idea of breaking with Chantepie. As for Monsieur Désenclos, after making a strong resistance and diligently pleading the cause of his protégé, he finished by submitting to the persistent will of his wife and the clearly-expressed desire of Simonne.

A few days later Jack Chantepie came to Palatrics to get a definite answer. He found the "*Cueilleux d'herbe*" and Lucile under the plane trees in the garden. He saluted them in his awkward and savage manner, and, without speaking, questioned Monsieur Désenclos with his eyes.

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The anxious look deeply moved the master of Palatries, and he realized that the time had come to make known the situation to the rejected suitor. After cordially shaking hands with him, he told him that he must renounce Simonne. Jack looked at the botanist without moving his lips, took several steps, and leaned against a tree.

"Ah," said Monsieur Désenclos, "but that silent sorrow touches one; I have done all I can and Simonne does not love him."

"But I love her, I!" cried Chantepie, and he put in that cry a heartrending sound, which showed all the violence and passion of his innocent egotism. His tawny eyes, usually half closed, were wide open, and their glances, full of suspicion and reproach, moved alternately from Lucile to Monsieur Désenclos. The latter shrugged his shoulders.

"You love her, I know," he replied, "but that is not sufficient. In a family only reciprocated affection gives happiness, and that is what my wife made me observe yesterday in regard to Simonne."

Chantepie turned quickly towards Lucile and the young wife was obliged to lower her eyes; how terrible were the flashes which darted from the eyes of the sombre guard of Commanderie.



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"So," said he slowly, continuing to gaze at Lucile; "you think, Monsieur Désenclos, to be happy; it does not suffice to love your wife with all your strength, but that she must render the same to you."

Lucile turned pale; as for her husband he became animated at once and replied with warmth:

"What, do you doubt it? Is happiness possible otherwise? A wife who does not love her husband and is made to perform his wishes, suffers in doing them, and her affection is like a plant carried to another climate, where it becomes dwarfed and stunted. And can you think that women resign themselves knowingly? There are some who become discouraged and deceive their husbands. What more like hell than such a family? The wife false and the husband suspicious! In such cases marriage is the worst misfortune which could happen to two creatures. This is my advice, and the reason I tell you to try and forget Simonne, who loves another. It is hard, I know, but before long we will find you a wife who loves you and will make you happy."

Monsieur Désenclos became flushed from speaking; his eyes were brilliant and his features illumined with an expression of feeling which rendered them truly beautiful.

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"We will find you a good wife like mine," he repeated, seizing Lucile's hand and kissing it rapidly. The young wife grew paler and paler; tremblingly she listened to the words of her husband with growing emotion. She had never heard him express himself with so much animation on a subject strange to his science. It seemed as if every word were addressed directly to her, and if the shadows had not been deep one could have seen the tears roll down her cold cheeks. Chantepie continued to fix his gaze upon her, like a wildcat that waits for a bird.

"You are right, Monsieur Désenclos," he said, after a moment's silence; "better remain alone than be laughed at on account of your wife, like some people I know. I have no chance; once married, I might find Simonne, some fine evening, walking in the woods with a lover. You are right; say no more. I cannot thank you enough, Monsieur Désenclos; you have already been kind to me, but this evening I am out of humor on account of it. For the present, adieu."

He turned his back on them hastily and disappeared in the darkness. It was time; Lucile felt her heart mocking her. She took several steps, uttered a deep sigh and fell on a bench.

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"What is it, darling?" said Monsieur Désenclos, startled.

"Let us go back," she said faintly, "that man frightens me."

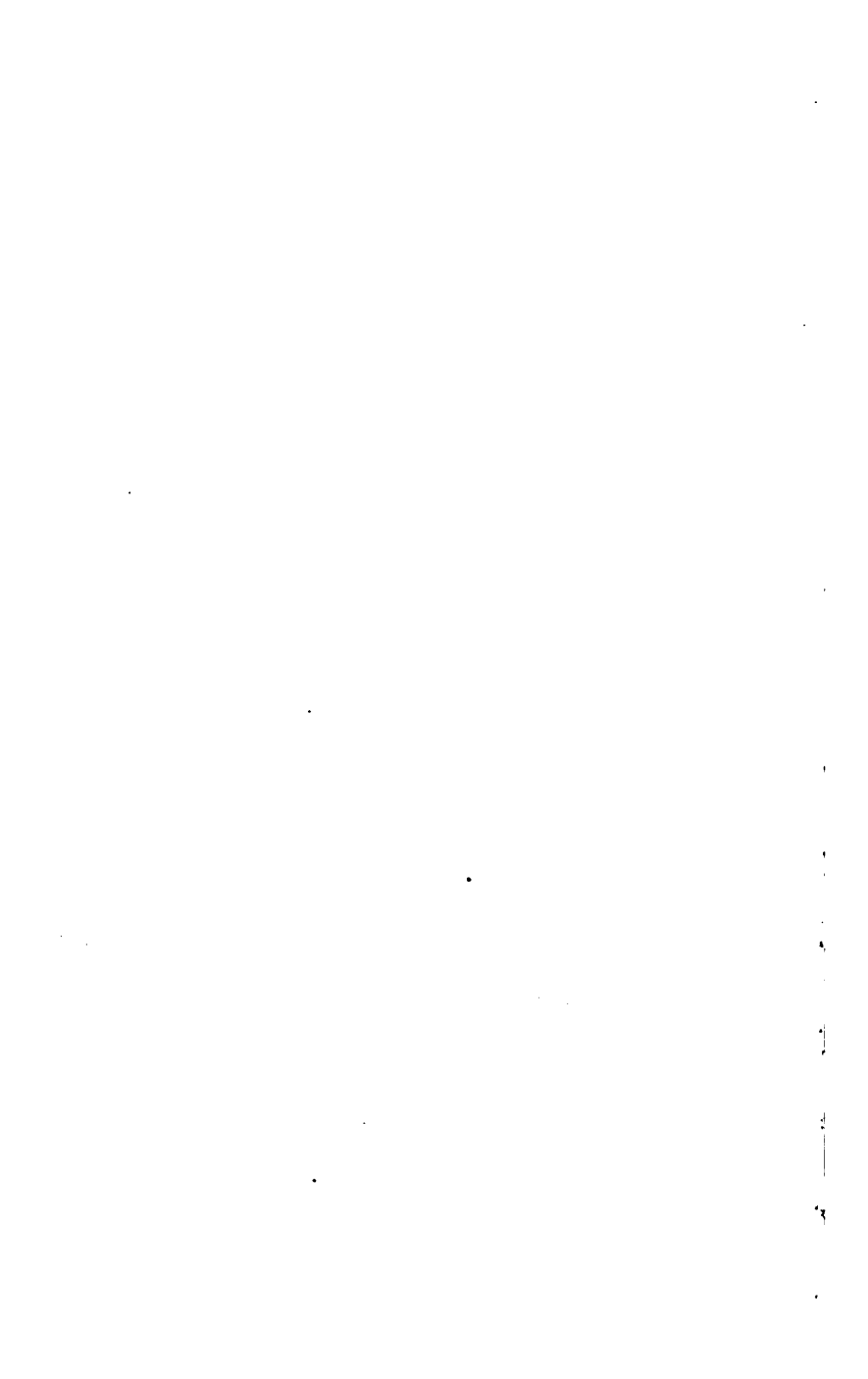
Chantepie, after leaving Palatries, started across the fields. When he reached the summit of the hill in the middle of a meadow which overlooked the valley, he sat down on a stone and shook his fist in the direction of Ages. At this gesture, his dog, who was lying beside him, stood up and uttered long barks.

"Unfortunately it is said that ill luck will not let me go," grumbled Jack. He rested his head in his hands, blood mounted to his throat, and thoughts of violence whirled confusedly through his brain. He would be revenged at any price, but how? Reveal to Monsieur Désenclos the treason of his wife? No; he loved the *Cueilleux d'herbes* too much to break his heart. He must find another way. He remained a long time plunged in gloomy meditation.

"Oh," said he at last, rising, "I will search my brain until I find an idea, and the day I get hold of it I will execute it. I swear to it by my baptism."

## CHAPTER THE FIFTH

Concerning a Meeting of Lovers



## A Mistress of Many Moods.

### CHAPTER V.

THE wedding of Sylvain and Simonne was fixed for Saint Louis' Day. That day, so impatiently awaited by the miller's wife and son, finally came. In the morning, the two violinists from Savigné arrived with their boys of honor for the bridegroom and his mother. Maurice was at the festival, as well as Monsieur and Mme. Désenclos, for the wedding was to take place at Palatries. The occasion was for him one of suffering. From the first step he took on the soil of Palatries, he felt the pain double. It was necessary for him to shake hands with Monsieur Désenclos and endure the cordial greeting of the man whose domestic happiness he was going to disturb. He saw Lucile for the first time at home in her little kingdom, where all breathed of prosperity and joy. A painful feeling of jealousy and shame took possession of him and would not leave him. All this luxury, these rare flowers, the fountains, this precious marble, all these beautiful and good things which surrounded Lucile and formed such

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an appropriate frame for her beauty, all this which would have given Maurice joy to lavish upon her, she owed to another. And her daughter, the little girl with the great open eyes, the rosy lips and the silvery voice, was the child of another. In all the slightest details of the interior Maurice recognized the influence and continual intervention of that other whom he had not up to the present had more than a glimpse of from a distance. Now the reality seized and rudely awoke him, making him feel that all his tenderness, all his love, was nothing but a sterile plant beside the tenderness and affection of Monsieur Désenclos.

When the guests were assembled, they started for Savigné, where the ceremony was to be performed. Headed by the musicians, they marched along the sheltered road to the church. The moment the party skirted the rustic cemetery, with its broken tombstones, lying like the hussars' jackets among the fennel grass and the tufts of mugwort, a head appeared over the wall—a head with a savage appearance and contracted features. It was Jack Chantepie; he had come to see Simonne in her wedding dress; he saw her smiling and supported on the arm of Sylvain. He gazed at her from a distance and for the first time,

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perhaps, tears rushed to his eyes; burning tears of passion as well as of sadness.

Maurice had hoped that the excitement of the wedding would permit him to see Lucile and speak to her more openly; but since the morning the young wife had seemed to avoid any chance of finding herself alone with him. Whenever she perceived him, she approached Simonne or Monsieur Désenclos. She was serious and preoccupied; her frank timidity had given place to a painful hesitancy. Fifteen days before the greatest boldness appeared innocent. Now the least fault seemed criminal, and she dared not address one word to Maurice. He could not explain the change in her, and her apparent coldness irritated him, increasing his passion. Towards evening he stayed a long time near the dance room, in the hope of meeting his friend. He was about to go when he saw her suddenly appear in the path which led to the dwelling house. Lucile walked rapidly and seemed in haste to return home. Seeing Maurice she took a movement backwards.

"I can at last speak to you," said the young man in a low voice. "Why do you fly from me?"

She remained silent; her embarrassed and timid air speedily increased the exaltation of her interlocutor, and without waiting for her response, he



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explained to her, with passionate grief, his love, and the feeling of jealousy which had agitated him since morning. He told her that the happiness of the newly-wedded couple made him feel sick, when he thought of the time when Lucile was at liberty to dispose of herself. There had once been an hour that he could speak to her of love without remorse, as Sylvain and Simonne did; but he had not sense enough to secure it, and that hour would never come again. He could never taste that pure happiness or possess Lucile.

"Oh, how I love you in spite of all my sufferings," he cried, suddenly, taking the young girl's hands.

These trembling words were far from reassuring Lucile, redoubling her embarrassment; she feared being recognized alone with Maurice in the dusk, and she begged him to let her go back to the house. He did not reply, but continued to press her hands with unconscious violence.

"Maurice," she murmured in a pleading voice, "I pray you be calm; let me go—you hurt me."

"Yes, you are right," he said; "I am a fool." He released her and she returned to Palatries.

A short time after the wedding Simonne came to live at Ages with Sylvain, and Monsieur Désen-

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clos departed for Angoumois, where he was to sojourn for several weeks. Lucile saw him leave with a feeling of disquiet; in the state of mind in which she found herself after the visit from Chan-tepie, she feared to remain alone in the house. She was afraid of Jacques, of Maurice, and of herself. So she easily yielded to the request of Mme. de Labrousse, who pressed her to accept her hospitality for a month. She went immediately to install herself at Commanderie, with her little girl.

The autumn had come; one of those magnificent autumns that one often finds in the West. The grapes ripened on the lattices, the pear trees drooped their branches to the earth, laden with fruit, and along the roads one could make the trees rain nuts with one blow of a pole. The sky, of a delicate blue, gently covered the horizon with a silvery mist, and was unlike the clearness of August; nature in its full maturity already resembled a mother lying on her bed exhausted from illness, who, pale and weary, is surrounded by a group of robust children.

What charm to wander about with Lucile in the bright days of September under the chestnut trees at Commanderie. The mere thought of these walks enchanted Maurice. How could he

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know when Mme. Désenclos installed herself at the widow's. He hated to present himself in Mme. de Labrousse's drawing-room, and this irritated her pride. The persistence of Maurice not to get beyond the first stages of the voyage of love-making provoked and grieved Césarine. Her head was more taken with him than she thought, and the longing had planted in her heart, deep, strong roots. The passions which are born in a woman of forty are like the plants which spring up from an old wall—persistent and tenacious. The polite coldness of Maurice only exasperated the widow, and she determined to triumph over his disdain. She promised herself she would watch him closely, and study his character; this part of her program she executed strictly. Instead of the hours of freedom and the dreamed-of walks, Maurice was condemned to the company of Mme. de Labrousse. The widow never left Lucile for eight days; he could not say one word in particular to his friend. The inevitable Césarine was always there, her eye on the alert, like a spider in its web. Little Madeline was the only one who gained by this constraint; all the adoration shut up in the heart of the young man was transformed into caresses for Lucile's child.

The actions of Mme. de Labrousse had a double

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result, on which she had not counted. It increased the passion of Maurice in its constraint, and rendered to Mme. Désenclos some of the security which she had lost. The presence of Césarine gave a certain air of innocence to Maurice's visits. Lucile could see him and speak to him now, without the perils of a tête-à-tête. Thanks to the widow, their conversation became calm and purely amicable. This apparent serenity deceived the young wife, and little by little her trouble disappeared, at last sleeping. At the end of a week her gaiety and birdlike thoughtlessness returned.

Towards the middle of September the vintage time arrived at Commanderie. St. Clementin was not a wine country, but around the boundaries several rows of vines, entangled together, were planted at random in order to fill the small casks of the farmers; but one knew little, except by hearsay, of the flavor of this rustic wine. Alone, of all the neighbors, Monsieur Désenclos and Mme. de Labrousse possessed several grape arbors, which were gathered by the whole community, the wine press at Commanderie serving for both crops. One evening while they were trampling the grapes from Palatries, Lucile and Maurice met in the press house. From a distance they

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heard the pickers singing as they returned to the vines. After an interval of silence one verse sung by a young voice came to their ears:

*“Rossignol sauvage,  
Rossignol des bois,  
Apprends-moi ton ramage  
Apprends-moi la manière  
Dont on se fait aimer.”*

At the first notes of this air, which brought dear memories to them, Maurice and Lucile looked at each other deeply moved. They were alone in a corner. They saw Mme. de Labrousse disappear around a curve, and the tired vintagers rested near a door at the other extremity of the vault. Darkness hung over the young people, and everyone had forgotten them. So complete their isolation, the noise of the wine press stifled all other sound.

“Do you still love me a little?” murmured Maurice. For reply Lucile gave him her hand, which he held in his own. “Can I never see you alone?” he continued, and when she shook her head and seemed to hesitate, he begged her to find some pretext to come and meet him under the chestnuts at nightfall.

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"No, no; what imprudence—besides, the park is closed."

"I will climb the wall," replied Maurice.

"No," she said, "that is impossible."

"I will await you," whispered the young man; but without listening Lucile had already left the press house. When Maurice departed in his turn, a head appeared beyond the vat, and two eyes followed him to the door of the press house. Chantepie was there. He had descended into the vat when the young people approached, and recognizing them, he had remained invisible and immovable at the bottom of his hiding place. When Maurice disappeared, he made a scornful gesture and began to crush the grapes and whistle.

The same day at nightfall Maurice leaped over the wall of the enclosure and gained the chestnut trees. Arriving at the border of the park he saw a light shining in the drawing-room at Com-manderie, and then a bright light in Lucile's room.

The young wife had gone to her apartment trembling and undecided. A secret presentiment said to her that at this moment Maurice was wandering about the garden, and she did not know what to do. She opened her window; a soft breeze, moistened by several drops of rain, rustled

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the leaves, and passing through the door sighed in the corridor.

"Poor friend," thought Lucile, looking at the somber chestnut trees, "he is there; he awaits me, and he will blame me, without doubt. Has he not a right? Did I not from the first encourage his passion, without being willing to listen to his scruples and counsels? I called him afraid; now it is I who tremble. He will think me selfish and capricious."

In the midst of her hesitation she enveloped herself in a long cloak.

"I will go, only to beg him to leave, and will come right back." She slipped out, leaving the light burning behind her. She went downstairs and reached the piazza steps without hindrance. Several times she stopped and looked carefully about her. It seemed as if the blackness of the path, the downtrodden grass, the great borders of roses, would all be accusers to-morrow, to make her feel her shame. When she was under the old trees she began to run, and arrived, swift as an arrow, in the glade. As soon as she saw Maurice her terror disappeared and joy returned to her. Breathless and palpitating she flew to him.

"My friend," she said, holding out her hand, "you are going to be reasonable and leave imme-

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diately. I tremble lest someone takes us unaware."

"You nervous child," he cried, "I would not recognize you. You were so brave in the cave at Chaffaux. What do you fear here?"

"I do not know," she replied; "it is a feeling I cannot account for. Everything startles me. I confess it to you, that I feel I am bad, and am full of remorse."

"Remorse!" He took her hands and made her sit beside him. "It is I who am the cause of all this trouble, but I love you so."

She listened to him and did not dream of leaving.

"Why do you torment yourself?" he continued. "Our love is not like the friendships which the world condemns. It is not a caprice born yesterday, but an affection which dates from our childhood. It slept, and was suddenly awakened, like the sleeping Beauty in the woods."

She tried to smile, but faintly, then became serious and melancholy.

"Stop," she said; "there is a thought which follows me and spoils all my joy. It was I who took the first step towards you, and if I had not advanced, you would not have come to me. I am



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sure that in the end you will judge me seriously."

"I adore you," cried Maurice, kissing her hands.

"Do you hear? There is someone walking in the woods," she whispered.

"Foolish child," he replied; "it is only a wood pigeon flying away."

"No; I assure you I heard steps. Let me go."

She tried to rise, but Maurice held her in his arms. "Maurice," she pleaded, and suddenly letting her head fall on the young man's shoulder, Lucile began to cry.

For the first time Maurice felt that adorable head reposing near his own; and that heart, swelled with love, beating next to his. A new pleasure seized him, and for the first time his mouth was pressed on Lucile's; but under the effects of that kiss the young woman started up, and tore herself from his arms.

"No," she said; "I do not want you to despise me later; I should die of shame;" and with tear-stained face, burning cheeks and troubled heart, she flew toward Commanderie.

During the week which followed, Maurice could not find an opportunity to be alone with Mme. Désenclos, as Mme. de Labrousse increased

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her amiability and wearied him with her attentions. Gradually he became a prey to sadness; he was restless, impatient and irritable. Mme. Désenclos was overcome with compassion at this spectacle, of which she was the first cause, and through pity love returned to be master of her heart. The days passed and the moment of Monsieur Désenclos' return approached, as he was expected on Saint Michel's day. At Poitou this is the season to engage in domestic occupation.

Mme. de Labrousse announced before Maurice that she was going to Ruffec, where she had business, and would stay there twenty-four hours. "Did Lucile care to accompany her?" she asked.

At the same time Maurice gave his friend a look in which there was such a poignant expression of sadness and entreaty, that she had not the courage to deny his mute supplication. She replied that Madeline was not well, and she preferred to remain at Commanderie. The conversation drifted into another course during the evening, but before leaving, the young man slipped a hastily-penciled note between Lucile's fingers.

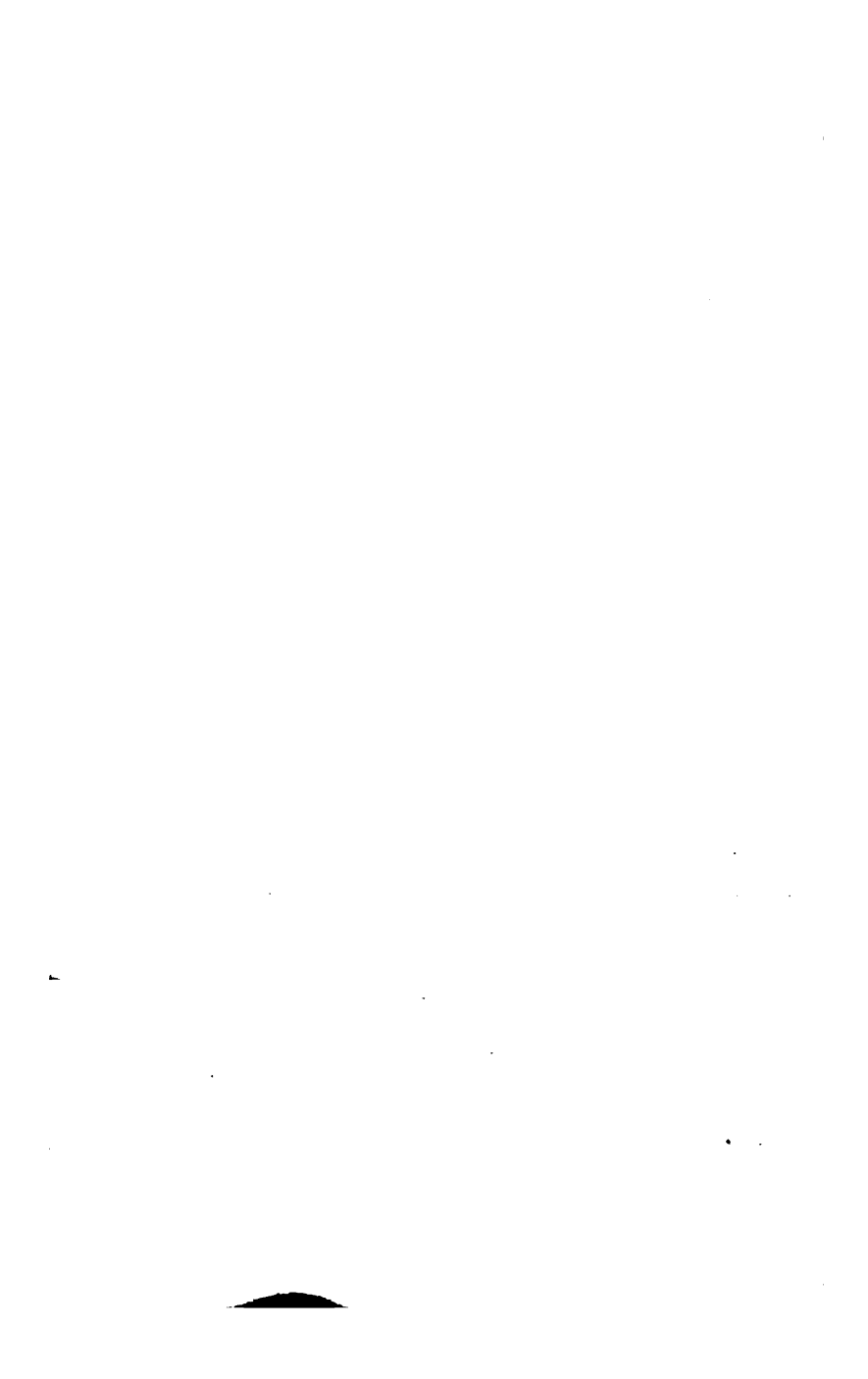
"I have suffered horribly for a week," he wrote. "I am oppressed, and must speak to you. I am leaving this place the day after to-morrow, for the

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rest of my life, and will be far away; but at sunset I will scale the wall of the park and await you in the group of chestnut trees. If you love me a little, you will come."

## CHAPTER THE SIXTH

Concerning the God Named “Fate”



## A Mistress of Many Moods.

### CHAPTER VI.

ON the eve of Saint Michel's day Maurice told Mother Jacquet that he would spend the next day at Chauoux. He started at an early hour, but having rested his horse at the first tavern of the nearest town, he retraced his steps, making a long circuit around the country, and finally returned to the woods of Ages, where he spent the remainder of the day. The sky was grey and the air foggy and cold, the whole landscape was filled with gloom. In the waving of the trees the cry of the birds, in the floating vapors along the horizon, even in the appearance of the rare flowers which still remained bright, there was a look of desolation. Maurice perceived none of it. All his attention was absorbed by the internal contemplation of Lucile's image, and the burning memory of his last encounter with her. From that evening it seemed as if the nature of his love had changed. A storm raged secretly within him. To take possession of Lucile, to lavish upon her all the world, to carry her away, trembling under

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his caresses, this was his desire. Now these were the unquiet thoughts which agitated him in the damp old woods of Ages.

In the drawing-room at Commanderie Mme. Désenclos was a prey to sentiments of another kind, but equally intense and anxious. She had already tried to pass the hours in reading, but what story was possible with those turbulent dreams, those feelings of repentance, and those vague fears, which agitated her? Sometimes her thoughts carried her to Palatrics. She remembered the calm days she had passed there before Maurice's return. She found herself seated on the terrace with her child at the hour in the evening when Monsieur Désenclos returned from his excursions. She saw him coming down the path from the vineyard, his smiling face under the big straw hat, and his arms full of wild flowers. She heard the child's fresh laughter join with the louder laugh of the father, and she said to herself with terror that she could never taste that calm joy again. She felt herself irresistibly carried to another life, full of restlessness and excitement, full also of regret and remorse. A life where it was necessary to lie, to play a perpetual comedy, returning at last to find the other existence with its peaceful and uniform happiness.

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Was it possible? Had she not herself tied the string which attached her to Maurice. She had proceeded him down the slope, but now they were gliding together, and the abyss attracted her. She was fascinated and could not turn her head. At the thought of this coming meeting under the chestnuts her heart beat and her eyes closed. She said to herself after this one time she would have nothing more to do with Maurice. Her eyes questioned the clock, one moment finding the hands too slow, and the next too rapid. "I love him," she said to herself, with tears in her eyes. "I am willing. I love him, and I am lost, and nothing can save us from each other."

Meanwhile the sky became a little clearer and the crimson sun sank behind the clouds. Lucile went out on the steps and Madeline ran to meet her, begging to be taken to the garden.

"Yes! yes!" said Lucile, making a sudden resolution; "come with me, my darling." She seized the child in her arms and carried her, covering her with kisses.

At the same hour, Chantepie, who was watchman in the park, was climbing one of the chestnut trees near the wall of the enclosure. He saw Maurice Jousserant traveling across the fields and turn towards Commanderie.



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"Here he is," he grumbled in a low tone. Then he slid to the ground, picked up his musket and began the task of loading it. "No small shot," he muttered, emptying the powder into the bullets, "but balls for a mad dog." He put it over his shoulder and sank down in the thicket.

The chestnut grove at Commanderie descends steeply towards the fields. Quite a long path comes out in a circle, cutting it diagonally, on both sides; the trellises along the borders are overgrown with such strong, thick vines, that it is impossible to see who comes. In the middle of the arch there is an old stone faun on a pedestal, covered with moss. Lucile came here and seated herself. The sun had disappeared, twilight was falling, and she began to feel uneasy; then she saw Maurice at the end of the walk. He stopped near Madeline, who hastened to meet him. Maurice picked the little girl up to kiss, and held her triumphantly in his arms. At the same moment a shot rang out. He uttered an exclamation and let Madeline fall, bleeding to the ground. The bullet, after scratching Maurice's arm, had struck the child.

Lucile ran to the scene of the disturbance. The little one, so dearly loved, was stretched out on the grass, the blood staining her white frock,

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and her little hands still holding the bits of flowering heather. She threw herself on her child, seized her convulsively in her arms, and rushed through the chestnut trees, filling the air with her cries of distress. During this time Maurice took upon himself to search the thicket for the would-be murderer, but without success.

Madeline breathed again and Mme. Désenclos insisted that she be removed at once to Palatries. A doctor was called in haste, who examined the wound and declared that the injury endangered the child's life. Lucile passed the night by the little one's pillow. What she suffered during that vigil no words can describe. Sometimes she felt her reason lost in an abyss of turbulent and disconnected thoughts. Sometimes a cold clearness followed this obscurity, and she questioned herself with horror as to what she could reply to her husband, when on his return he found his child dying.

The details of the accident did not remain long in obscurity. One person only could have pulled the trigger of the musket—"Chantepie." The old poacher was master of her secret; once taken, he would avow it. The people of Commanderie had without doubt perceived Maurice, and they gossiped; above all, she saw herself addressing her accusers. Her honor was lost and her child was

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dying. It seemed to her as if her whole life were cut off on all sides at once. Then she leaned over little Madeline's bedside and covered her hands with kisses. She rose to walk the room, a prey to painful, nervous agitation. When physically broken down, she dropped into a chair, but there remorse came to torture her soul.

The following day Monsieur Désenclos and Mme. de Labrousse arrived at the same time at Commanderie, and together they learned the sad news. They were rapidly given the confused details which had been gathered from the despairing words of the mother. Monsieur Désenclos listened with pain, and then hurried to Palatries. On hearing the sound of his voice, Lucile, weakened by the anguish of the night, felt her heart stop beating, and she fell unconscious. They carried her to her room and Monsieur Désenclos went to sit by the bed of his child, whom he would not leave. When Lucile came to herself they told her that the doctor feared cerebral inflammation. She crept to the child and remained unseen behind the curtains, hardly daring to raise her eyes to her husband, seated opposite her. Absorbed in his sorrow and as if petrified, he was contented to make a gesture of the hand for her

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to remain silent, and then settled again to the contemplation of his dearly loved daughter.

Several days passed. Chantepie had not been seen at Commanderie since the evening the shot was fired. His strange disappearance, joined with the former evil life of the watchman, gave suspicion to the police, and they issued a warrant against him. Monsieur Désenclos learned of this new incident without giving a sign of surprise or indignation. His child, alone, occupied him. The doctor gave but little hope. Lucile conducted him to the terrace and questioned him several times with anxiety, but each time he confined himself to a shake of the head and an air of doubt. Then she would return sorrowfully, to sit opposite her husband, whose silence frightened her. She felt herself guilty, and expected to see reproach in his slightest gesture. Why did he not address a word to her? Surely he knew all, and he despised her. In the midst of her anguish and remorse she was deeply touched with pity and respect for this honest man, who loved her so seriously and whom she had made to suffer so cruelly. She admired him, and her repentance doubled. Oh, if she could only go back and recover those hours which had passed since the evening of the *ballade* at Puits-Carré. Up to

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then she had never viewed life excepting as a joyous road easy to follow; now she saw in it the difficult passes and perilous heights. She understood for the first time that on the severe face of human existence the joys of youth and the intoxication of love form but capricious and frail embellishments, and that a noble life is composed of incessant struggles and courageous renouncements. So day by day, or rather hour by hour, trouble matured her and transformed her from the careless child to the serious woman, ready for all sacrifices and all trials.

At Ages, Maurice also had his share of suffering; but the anguish, instead of destroying his passion, only increased it. He wished to see Lucile and throw himself at her feet and implore her pardon; but he looked in vain for some means of reaching her. All Saints' Day came, and in that part of Poitou the boys of the village pass the night which precedes the festival of the dead, in ringing the knell in every parish. It is a usage from time immemorial; only the old custom has lost, with the times, a little of its religious and solemn character. It has become a pretext for a supper; for which the young people beg the refreshments in the village and from the neighboring manors. The eve of the fête Maurice

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heard in the court of Ages the boys from Savigné singing in chorus the old and melancholy hymn of All Saints. He listened to them with reverence, and when they moved on in the direction of Palatries he thought that the surest means of seeing Lucile, without compromising her, was to join with them and make his way to her.

A thick fog enveloped the valley, so Maurice could follow the singers without being recognized. They mounted to Palatries, but when they entered the avenue of walnut trees their songs ceased, because they knew that sorrow was in the house. Monsieur Désenclos did not leave the child's bed, but Lucile came herself to receive them on the terrace. Maurice hid behind a linden tree, and saw her distribute her offerings; he heard her reply to their questions in a sad, sweet tone, about her child's health. Slowly the boys departed; then he approached her, and called in a pleading tone. She trembled all over at this well-known voice, and stopped.

"Lucile," whispered Maurice, "forgive me; tell me that you do not hate me, and speak to me."

She felt herself filled with pity, but she thought at the same time of the sick child and the little room where the father watched. She would not let him continue.

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"Dear," she said, rapidly, "forget the past, and never see me again."

"Lucile," he cried, and held his hand out to her; but she pushed it away.

"Good-bye, good-bye," she stammered, and fled away.

He saw her disappear, and slowly descended the garden walk. The valley was shrouded in mist and the sky was dark; from a distance the bells of Savigné and St. Clementin commenced to sound the knell of the festival of the dead, and sometimes one heard the song of the young boys, who continued to beg from one place to another.

Maurice left Ages on the morrow. The same day Madeline's sickness appeared to take a new phase; the fever diminished and finally disappeared. One morning the doctor declared the danger over. Lucile uttered a cry of joy, and pressed his hands with effusion when she conducted him to the garden gate. She returned greatly moved, and stopped on the landing-place. Her eyes were full of tears, and she wished to wipe them away before entering. She heard Monsieur Désenclos, who spoke to Madeline in a tender, joyous voice. The child held up her thin arms and answered him in a feeble tone.

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"She recognizes me—she is saved!" cried the father, perceiving his wife.

Lucile felt herself carried away by her emotion. Her generous and impetuous nature had gotten the upper hand. She ran to Monsieur Désenclos and fell on her knees before him, and seized his hands.

"Pardon! Oh, pardon me," she cried.

Her husband regarded her with natural astonishment and raised her up.

"Pardon," said he; "and of what are you guilty? Is it your fault if this miserable Chantepie is revenged on you? The poor fool still thought of the marriage of Simonne. He has done himself more than justice; they found him hanged in the woods of Ages. Say no more about it," he added with vivacity. "It is I who have a thousand pardons to demand of you. I have been inattentive during the last month, but the child absorbed me. If she had died I must have followed her."

Then, in the heavy, cloudy sky, there was a sudden breaking; the azure deepness appeared all at once; the fields were flooded with light, and the nightingales sang in the fresh air. At the words of Monsieur Désenclos the young wife's soul brightened with a great and sudden joy, and she heard songs of hope breaking forth within her.



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He knew nothing and she had lost none of his affection; the evil was not irreparable. She could take possession of her sweet kingdom at Palatrics, and commence a new life without deceit building between herself and her husband an insuperable wall. And Madeline was cured, and she herself was saved.

Lucile threw herself in Monsieur Désenclos' arms. "Oh, you are good," she exclaimed, and began to cry.

Madeline promptly recovered, and by spring the *Cueilleux d'herbes* could take up his excursions again, this time accompanied by his wife and daughter. Mme. de Labrousse, being disgusted with Commanderie, settled herself at Poitiers, and feeling the approach of fifty years, she became very devout. Maurice Jousserant never came back to his home again.

"He is traveling through the Orient," they said.

In spite of her resolutions, Lucile was unable to banish him from her thoughts, and in April, when the shoots of flax commenced to redden about the mill, she looked at the valley with regret, and thought of the previous spring; but the education of her daughter and the cares of her house prevented these reveries from becoming

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dangerous. The memory appeared now to her mind as Joubert wished that his memory might appear to his friends: "With a tear of compassion on the eyelids, and a smile on the lips."



Mid. 24.



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